

“Having Confidence in the Church”

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, for New Horizon URC, second service on April 2, 2017

Catechism: Q & A 54 Bible illustrations: Ephesians 1:1-4a,20-23; 2:11-14, 19-21;

Introduction: I believe IN the church. Some early versions of the Apostles’ Creed (使徒信经) put it that way: “I believe IN the holy, universal church.” But the Bible does *not* directly teach us to believe IN the church. The Bible *does* teach us to believe IN Jesus.

Most versions of our Creed word it this way: “I believe **A** holy, universal church.” That is, we believe about the church. It’s alright, to word it that way.

But I wonder: is that saying enough? And I think it is not saying enough. We don’t just believe true things “*about*” the church. The Bible talks more strongly about the church. So maybe this is the best way to put it: we must have **CONFIDENCE** in the church.

Why? Because of Jesus. Because Jesus is Head of the Church. If we have confidence in Jesus, the Head, we must have confidence in His Body, the Church. [Repeat.

Let’s turn to the book of Ephesians to show this. [Read Ephesians 1:1-4a.

[Re-read Ephesians 1:1. Paul is writing to the believers in the ancient city of Ephesus. He’s writing to “the church” in Ephesus. Who are they? Vs. 1: “the saints...in Christ Jesus.” Saints, that is, holy ones, holy people. Paul is not writing to one person, or to several persons. Instead, Paul is writing to the church, the Body of Jesus in that place. He is writing to the holy church. To those who have been credited with Jesus’ holiness and righteousness (义) .

[Read vs. 2. “Grace to YOU and peace.” In the original Greek, in which Paul uses, this is the “you PLURAL.” “All of you” in the church in Ephesus. That’s made clear in [Vs. 3. Read. “US.” First person plural. “All of us.” WE in the church, the whole group of believers.

We can say that Paul not only believed in Jesus--he also believed in the church. In some sense.

That verb, “believe” can be translated in various ways. Of course, when it comes to Jesus, we believe in Him as Saviour. But when it comes to the church, we can say this: “I have confidence in the church.” That’s another meaning of the verb “believe.” To have confidence in someone or something. To be able to entrust (托付) yourself to them.

Of course, we are talking here about the *true* church. We are not talking about any group which calls itself “church.” But only the true church. We have confidence in the true church.

-Think about this in another way: why did Jesus come into our world? Well, we say, Jesus came into our world to save sinners. That’s true. That’s biblical. But we could just as well say this: “Jesus came into this world to establish His Church.” That is equally, biblically true.

Look at the end of Ephesians, chapter 1. Here, Paul is praying for the church in Ephesus.

[Read vs. 16. Paul’s prayer request is that God “may give you [the believers in Ephesus, members of the church, all of them] the spirit of wisdom and revelation (启示)” ...

[Read vs. 18, that their eyes “might be enlightened.

So that they may know” certain things better. What things should they know better?

[Look at vs. 19—the greatness of God’s power toward us who believe. [Then read vss. 20-23.

God raised Jesus from the dead, not just for Jesus’ sake. God’s purpose in raising Jesus, and exalting him in heaven...*is for the sake of the Church*. [Re-read vs.22. In his resurrection (复活) and ascension (升天) , Jesus is proved to be HEAD of the CHURCH. Why did Jesus come to earth? To become HEAD of the CHURCH. And to fill the church with His fullness.

So again: we have CONFIDENCE in the Church, because Jesus has confidence in the Church.

The Church, as the spiritual body of Jesus, is the heart of God’s final goal. His final plan. That Jesus would have a special people. A people that exist for the praise of God’s glory.

Too many people today have little regard (敬意) for the church. They ridicule the church.

They criticize the church. Or, they refuse to join the church. Or, they quickly leave the church, for no biblical reason. People will say that they love Jesus, they love the Head; but they don’t love the Church, the Body of Jesus. That is wrong!

Listen to 16th century theologian, John Calvin: “I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons... [that they] may be nourished by her help [the church’s help] ...as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care [the Church’s motherly

bosom God is pleased to gather his sons... [that they] may be nourished by her help [the church's help] ...as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care [the Church's motherly care.]... Until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith." [That goal of faith is in heaven. Then this line...] ...for those to whom he [God] is Father the church may also be Mother" (Inst., 4.1.1., p. 1012). [Repeat.

Let me ask: do you love your mother, especially your godly and loving mother? Yes! You, likewise, must love your church. She is your spiritual Mother. Calvin goes on to say this: [Quote] "For there is no other way to enter into [eternal] life unless this mother conceive 孕育 us in her womb, give us birth, {and} nourish us at her breast." "Away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation." Wow! (Inst., 4.1.4., p. 1016).

I quoted these words recently in Costa Rica, among missionary churches there. Someone said to me, "Be careful, Pastor Rand. People will think we are like the Roman Catholics!" Well, I wonder if we Protestants (新教徒) have gone too far the opposite way. As if the Church is something optional for us. No! If we have God as our Father, we have the Church as our Mother.

You and I must have CONFIDENCE in the Church. We must LOVE her, as Mother.

2. *Let's look briefly* at the *main characteristics* of the church.

Sometimes called the "attributes" (属性, 特点) of the church. Let's consider three characteristics of the church. Found in the Apostles Creed, and in the Nicene Creed (尼西亚信经).

2.A. First, we believe a **HOLY** church. We have confidence in the *holiness* of Jesus' church.

We earlier noted Ephesians 1:1—that in the New Testament we in the church often are called "saints." That is, "those declared to be holy." Holy members of a holy church.

Now, holiness has two aspects: first, something said to be holy is set apart by God from all that is common and ordinary. And set apart, especially, to serve God. So the temple building in the OT was said to be a "holy" temple. Set apart unto God's special service.

The second aspect of holiness is that holy people are expected to be pure, without moral or spiritual uncleanness. Often this second aspect is regarded as the most important aspect. But the first aspect, is just as important. We in the holy church, filled with the Holy Spirit, are set apart for God's special service. That service means, serving God, first of all. Obeying God. But it also means serving our fellow human beings.

[Look at 1 Peter 2:9.

We in the church are a holy people, so that we would declare God's praises, out to our world.

To everyone. To all people.

App: How is that for us, as the New Horizon church? Are we, as church, declaring God's praises out in the world? Are you shining as a light out in this community?

How might you as church do that better?

2.B. A *second characteristic* of the church is its "*catholicity*."

That's an old word. In the version we use, here, at New Horizon, we say, "I believe a holy, *universal* church."

The word "catholic" means "universal." It does not mean "Roman Catholic." That's "catholic" using a big C, a capital C.

But "catholic" using a small c, a little c, means "universal."

That is to say that the church is not limited to one place in the world. It is not limited to one people group. Rather, the church of Jesus is *a worldwide, universal church*.

Now, many sermons could be preached just about this one teaching. But let me just say this.

Every church ideally should have people from a variety of backgrounds. Of different backgrounds. Now, of course, some towns here in Canada mostly have one kind of people.

Yet, even there, those churches should have members of different economic backgrounds, some who are poorer, others who are richer. Their churches should include people from a variety of ages. And, ideally, there should be singles as well as families. Wonderfully, you also have that here, in this church.

Of course, here in Toronto, we have special opportunity to show this "universal" aspect of Jesus' church. Look at the people in the chairs in front of you, or behind you. If it weren't for this church, would you have become friends with these people? Would you be associating with these kind of people? Probably not. Nor would I. I would probably be mostly with my own kind of people.

[Read Eph 2:11-14. Two big groups in the church in Ephesus: some were of Jewish

background; others were of "Gentile" background. A Gentile, as you might know, is any non-Jew.

Historically, Jews and Gentiles were enemies. Many Jewish rabbis had taught that Jews should hate the Gentiles, and stay completely separated from them.

But in the church of Jesus, those two people groups became ONE GROUP. Why? Because J. has just One Body. There must be no separation...but all groups become ONE in Jesus' church.

Here's a "take-away," practically: we must be on our guard against any kind of separation in the church. But none of us are perfect in this. And sometimes we, ourselves, can feel hurt.

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I think of the new church that my wife and I are attending. 90% of the church is made of up adults in their 20s. 90%. I won't say my wife's age... but I am in my 50s. And sometimes, in my human nature, as an older person in my church, I can feel neglected. Overlooked. But listen: I have to work on that. It is my responsibility to get to know the younger members. And to value them. And to view them as my friends, and brothers, and sisters.

And you must work on that, also. If for some reason you feel neglected. Or if you feel hurt in some way. You must work on being "one, universal" church. In the Lord Jesus.

2.C. The Nicene Creed gives one more characteristic of the true church.

It is the "**apostolic** church." That is to say, the church is founded upon the apostles (使徒) .

[Read 2:19-21.

The true church goes way back. To the time of the apostles. The original disciples of Jesus who were later called "apostles." And a few others, like Paul, who is known as "the apostle" Paul.

Many believers today think that their church somehow, was established in the 1970s or 1980s or even in the 2000s. No. Every true church has its foundation back to the first century AD. To the time of Jesus' apostles.

That should give us more confidence in the church. How is that? Well, think of this church,

New Horizon. This church is not based on Pastor Mitchell. Nor is it based on Cornerstone church in London. It's not even based on the starting of the United Reformed Churches.

Rather, this church actually goes back to the time of the first apostles. !! The first century A.D.

To the men who were called and taught by Jesus Himself. They personally knew the Saviour. They saw him resurrected from the dead. They saw him go up to heaven.

They saw the power of the Spirit which Jesus poured out, on the Day of Pentecost (五旬节) .

And these apostles, mostly wrote the words of what we call the New Testament.

So the apostles, along with the ancient prophets, are the "foundation" of the church.

They are not removed from Jesus. Vs. 20 says that in that foundation is Jesus.

Jesus is the cornerstone, holding all the foundation and all the walls together.

That helps give us even more confidence in the Church. Because every pastor, every preacher, is standing on the shoulders of those pastors and preachers who lived before. Good, biblical pastors and preachers. And we ultimately stand on the shoulders of the Great Apostles. Godly men who personally talked with Jesus. Listened to Jesus. Who were later sent out by Jesus to be preachers and missionaries. And who were inspired to write down the words of the Bible. Truthful words. Dependable words.

Oh, how we must have more **CONFIDENCE** in the CHURCH today.

Why? Because, first of all, the church is the **BODY** of Jesus. His **BODY** of believers in this world today. The church is the **PLAN** of God for the ages. That God is forming a people to declare His praises. Not only for this life. But for eternity to come.

So we must **ENTRUST** ourselves to the church. Why? Because she is our **SPIRITUAL MOTHER**. And because she is **HOLY, UNIVERSAL, APOSTOLIC**. Let us pray.