

Covenant Keepers

Lesson 18 **The Church**

The ‘One, Holy, Catholic & Apostolic’ Church

“One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” are the four distinctive features of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. These are also known as the ‘*Four Marks of the Church*’, or, the ‘*Four Attributes of the Church*’. Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Its followers, known as Christians, form the universal Church. This Church becomes ‘One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic’ because she has a common theology and an ecclesiology based on the origin of Christianity, her relationship to Jesus, her role in salvation, her polity, discipline, destiny, theology, liturgy, spirituality and the apostolicity of the leadership.

ONE: The Church is considered One and whole in herself. She is united in the one Lord, all her members confess one faith and is united by one Baptism. Church is the One Mystical Body of Christ – united in Christ Jesus. Church is bound together and given life by the One Spirit (Cf. Eph. 4:5-6). It is the same hope that all her members have – to attain heaven and be united with the Triune God. In the letter to the Corinthians, he tells: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:27), and declares that, "just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). This unity is a mystery.

HOLY: The word *holy* means set apart for a special purpose by and for God. The Church is set apart for Christ and therefore it is holy. The Church is holy because the Most Holy God is her author. Christ is the bridegroom and Church is the bride and the bridegroom gave himself up on the cross to sanctify her and to make her holy. The Holy Spirit which is active in the Church makes her life pure and holy. Since she still includes sinners who are made holy by baptism and the other sacraments, she is ‘the sinless one made up of sinners. Her holiness shines in the saints and in Mary who is already all-holy.

CATHOLIC: The word ‘Catholic’ (Greek: *katholikos*) means "general", "universal", “whole”, “entire”, etc. Catholic Church is whole in herself and universal in nature. The Church is Catholic because she bears in herself and administers the totality of the means of salvation through the sacramental life. She is sent out to all peoples. She speaks to all men. She encompasses all times. She is missionary by her very nature. In the Church we have the wholeness of the Christian faith, full and complete, all-embracing, and is proclaimed to all people without excluding any part of the faith or any class or group of people.

APOSTOLIC: The term ‘Apostolic’ describes the Church's foundation and beliefs as rooted and continuing in the living Tradition of the Apostles of Jesus. The Church is Apostolic because she is built on a lasting foundation of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. She is indestructible and has a strong foundation, which shall never be shaken. She is upheld infallibly in the truth; Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops, who have received their apostolic succession through the laying on of hands. The Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Oriental Orthodox and the Church of the East claim to have preserved their apostolic succession and the original teaching handed down by the apostles.

DIVIDED CHURCH: YET, ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC

The First Council of Nicaea held in 325AD formulated the Nicæan Creed in which the four attributed of the Church viz., ‘One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic’, appeared for the first time. It was expressly stated and held irrevocable in the First Council of Constantinople held in 381 and hence it was called the **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed**. It stated thus, “[We believe] in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” This ecumenical creed is today recited in the liturgy of both the Catholic and non-Catholic Churches.

The Catholic Churches: Roman Catholics (Latin and Eastern Rites) believe that the description "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" is applicable to the Roman Catholic Church. They hold that Christ established here on earth only one Church and the Catholic Church has the treasury of the Liturgy, Word of God, Sacred Tradition, Magisterium, Sacraments and Sacramentals, all of which contribute to the wholeness and oneness of the Church. All the Catholic Churches claim to be founded by the Apostles themselves and has the fulness of revelation too.

Eastern Orthodox Church: It teaches that the Eastern Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church established by Jesus Christ in his Great Commission, and that its bishops are the successors of Christ's apostles. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Orthodox_Church It maintains that it practices the original Christian faith, as passed down by holy tradition. It recognises seven major sacraments, of which the Eucharist is the principal one.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches: The Oriental Orthodox Churches, comprise six individual churches: the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch (including its archdiocese in India called the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church), the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India. Collectively, they consider themselves to be the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church founded by Jesus Christ, and that its bishops are the successors of Christ's apostles.

The Church of the East: Officially called the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, it claims to be the 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic' Church. It follows the traditional Christology and ecclesiology of the eastern branch of Syriac Christianity, and uses the Divine Liturgy of Saints Mar Addai and Mar Mari belonging to the East Syrian Liturgy. The Church also has an archdiocese based in India, known as the Assyrian Church of the East at Thrissur, Kerala.

The Protestant Churches: The Protestant Churches in general accept the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed except for the fact that they have replaced the word 'Catholic' with 'Christian'. Therefore, they call the Church to be 'One, Holy, Christian and Apostolic'. The Moravian Church, The Lutheran Church, The Methodist Churches, The Presbyterian Churches, The Anglican Communion and Calvinism are the mainline Protestant Churches which generally accept the Creed. Protestant theology typically emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the authority of the Scriptures and the necessity of grace through faith in Christ.

CONCLUSION

The sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. The Catholic Church contains the fulness of revelation and tries to remain faithful to it and therefore She can be acclaimed as 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic'.

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The 'One, Holy, Catholic & Apostolic' Church

Video References:

1. Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfShLk9nHow> - In 5 minutes, this Video Captures The Beauty Of The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church
2. Video: <https://youtu.be/ZeysmTk9tZM> - The Four Marks of the Church.