



We confess in the Apostles' Creed; "I believe in the Holy Christian Church..." What do we mean when we use the word church? Church can mean the building in which we worship, the denomination to which we belong or the congregation of which we are members as well. "The word **Church** properly speaking, refers to all those who believe in Christ" (2017 Catechism, Q. 202, p.207). The Catechism asks the question (202) **"What is the Church?" "It is the Body of Christ-that is, all people whom the Spirit by the Means of Grace, has gathered to Christ in faith throughout the world" (p.206).** The Augsburg Confession states: "Strickly speaking the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers" AC VIII. Scripture clearly teaches the Church is the body of Christ of which He is Head (**Ephesians 1:22-23**). Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that **"Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" Ephesians 5:25-27.**

During the Reformation there was discussion as to what the "church" was and who were its members. Today misunderstandings abound as to what the church is and who belongs and what the church does. Many do not like to associate church with a belief in God. Some preachers who are talking about Jesus in their TV commercials say things like "...I'm not talking about religion, I'm talking about a personal relationship with Jesus..." There are many similar statements and claims on the internet and television. The implication by such a statement is that church is not necessary because all you have to do is "invite Jesus into your heart and make Him your Savior." The fact is Jesus made Himself your Savior by His death on the cross and resurrection. But what about the Church, of which Jesus Himself is the Head? The way Scripture describes "Church" is important.

Jesus gave His disciples The Office of the Keys in **John 20:23 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."** The Church is the the gathering of believers in which God "daily and richly forgives my sins and the sins of all belivers" (2017 Catechism, p.207). The Church belongs to Christ and we are made members in Baptism, when God makes us His own giving to us all the blessings earned by Christ on His cross and in His Resurrection. We belong to Christ and are members of His Church because **"He (God) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" Colossias 1:13-14.**

Sadly, many today do not care to be members of a church. The appeal of being told that "religion" is not what Christ offers pushes the idea of not having to belong to a local congregation. The misunderstanding is concerning in that at a minimum it teaches church membership is not essential. The greater danger is that one does not understand the word church as belonging to Christ and His Church. Trusting one's own ability to make "Christ your own Savior" is to rely on good works toward favor with God. Scripture teaches it is actually Christ who makes Himself your Savior by His work of Redemption and salvation on the cross. (**Colossians 1:13-14**)

The Church is based on the teachings of Jesus, that He is the Savior who lived, died, was buried and rose again for the forgiveness of sins; revealed in the Scriptures and is to be brought to all people by Gospel proclamation. Therefore, the Church, is the only place in which salvation is found because Christ its Head, is the One who comes through His Word and Sacraments. Under inspiration of The Holy Spirit Paul states: **"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" Ephesians 2:19-20.** In a society where the word religion has gathered a negative tone and the word church is thought of as involving too many obligations, we are given comfort that Christ brings us into His Church by His work of redemption and that we are saved by grace and that nothing shall prevail against His Church for He **"loved the Church and gave Himself up for her" Ephesians 5:25b.**

**The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.**

**From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.**

LSB 644 "The Church's One Foundation" stanza 1

God's Blessings in Christ, Pastor Ahrendt