

We believe...

THE CREED OF THE NEW APOSTOLIC CHURCH

MAY 2020

Session 1: Apostles & Ministry

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Session 1 – The Creed: Apostles & Ministry

Hello and welcome to our small group study for May! This month, we will continue our study on our Creed by focusing on the fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth articles. We'll begin by looking 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, 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, 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 ministrations 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.

Session 2 – The Creed: 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 him into His new covenant. Additionally, the one who is baptized with water also responds to God with his “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 Lord and 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.

Session 3 – The Creed: 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.