



## The Creed

### Part 5 – I Believe in the Holy Spirit and the Church

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're in this series called *The Creed*. If you're brand new, some of you showed up and you just got blindsided by the statement, "holy catholic Church." Last week, a guy looked at his wife and said, "We ain't coming back."

I said, "You've got to let us explain it before you dart out on us." So, that's where we're at today. In seven weeks, we're covering the Apostles' Creed. We're using the Apostles' Creed as an outline. We're just walking through it. It's a concise statement of our essential beliefs.

Today, we're in Part 5, looking at *I Believe in the Holy Spirit and the Church*. These are the three lines: **I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church... ..and the communion of saints.** What you should be more nervous about, if you come from the Assemblies of God, is this non-charismatic, recovering Baptist preacher teaching on the Holy Spirit because that always brings about a little bit of fear. I love my Assemblies of God friends and for some reason over the last couple of years, I've found favor with this denomination. Pastor Dan Betzer, he just turned 80 years old. I consider him like a Godfather in the Assemblies of God at First Assembly of God in Fort Myers.

I've done their marriage conference four years in a row. It's rare to do that many. I told him at the end when he came up to me... He said, "I'm looking forward to next year."

I said, "Pastor, I've got to be honest with you. I have nothing left to say marriage. I have said it all. Everything I believe about marriage has been laid out there for your congregation and you've heard every joke twice, so I've got nothing left."

I'll never forget Pastor Dan walking up to me... He's a golfer and he wears a very comfortable shirt. He puts his hands on my shoulder and he says, "Ted, do you believe in the Holy Ghost?"

I said, "Yes sir, I do."

He said, "I'll see you next year." Some of you don't get it. He said, "You'll find something to say." Not, "You're going to have to discover something new" or "I will pray between now and next year that the Holy Spirit will speak something new to you."

I know there are some in here that grew up in a church that talked about the subject of the Holy Spirit all the time and for some of you, the only time you heard about the Holy Spirit was when the pastor used him to get more time in a sermon. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? "As the spirit leads, I'm going long." And that's about all you ever heard about the Holy Spirit. It's why you never sang the third verse of any hymn because it mentions the Holy Spirit.

About two years ago, I was in Sarasota and I was speaking on marriage to all the superintendents of the Assemblies of God from all the states. George Wood, the main superintendent was sitting right there. I spoke and we had a great time and we laughed together and we talked about marriage and at the end, they stood up and all the superintendents, like all the Godfathers of the Assemblies of God stood up and said, "Let's lay hands on Ted." I let out an audible "Oh no!" from the front. I'm like, "Is this where it happens? Is this going to go down right now? I'm either getting anointed, filled, sent, ordained. I don't know what you people do, but I know when the hands come out, it ain't good at all."

I'm not going to mention his name, but years ago, I sat in a meeting where we started with prayer. I'm not going to say his name, but his initials are Clay Self. I was sitting next to Clay as the pastor started praying, the pastor of a large Assembly of God church in Springfield. I'm not going to tell you who it is. It's on Highway 65 right on the east side, but I'm not going to tell you who it is. His initials are Pastor John Lindell. He starts praying and he (let's just say) brings down the thunder. And as he's praying, everybody in the room starts praying.

For like ten minutes of prayer, Clay and I are sitting there together and we're like in a foxhole together. We're dodging and ducking all these different prayers coming at us. I'll never forget Clay going, "What was that?!" I go, "That was spirit-filled believers bringing down the thunder."

There are about 12 of you in here right now. There's one right there. Anybody from James River visiting down in Branson today? Well, we love John. There you are. Don't tell John. Let's leave it in here and on the internet, alright?

I say all that to say with this subject, for some, it's like, "We didn't talk about him, Ted. He's the third person of the Trinity, yes..." If you're brand new to the term Trinity, we believe in one God. Three persons in one God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As we teach about this today, we want to talk about the Holy Spirit and how he works, not just in the life of a believer, but how he works in community. It's very important that we keep those two linked as we study.

If you have your Bible, turn to John 16. I saw one dad walking here with four of them stacked under his arm. I said, "We should get you a briefcase or something." I don't know where that dad is.

To start us off today, we really need to get into the frame of mind of the disciples, briefly. Jesus is preparing them for his departure. He's letting them know the time for him has come. We've already looked at this in The Creed: crucified, dead, and buried. And before he ascends to the right hand of the Father, he's been preparing his disciples all along through his earthly ministry, all the way up until the ascension.

As he would talk about leaving them... I think sometimes we can just skim through this in the scripture and not really understand what's going on. But in the heart and minds of the disciples is this idea: *The Romans hate us because they think all we do is disturb the peace. The Jewish leaders hate us because they think we are blasphemers. Jesus, you're all we've got. We have community with you. We are one in you; we can't even bear the thought of you no longer being here.* It's why Jesus prays at the end of his earthly ministry, "Father, I pray they are one as you and I are one." For the disciples to wrap their brain around this...

Now watch what Jesus comes in and says as we look at John 16. **7** *"But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away..."* That's how we have to start this whole message on the Holy Spirit and the Church today, that it's for our good that Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father where he is now and from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. We looked at that last week.

*"...Unless I go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 about sin, because people do not believe in me... They would go their own way. It's about them and it's about what they believe, but the Holy Spirit is going to convict the hearts of men and women. 10 "...about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.*

The role of the Holy Spirit is to convict men and women of sin and of righteousness, but as we look at this today, a couple of things. We are going to look at the nature of the Holy Spirit and what he does, but when we get to the Holy Spirit working in community, often times, as a church... And this is my fault. As a church, when we talk about the church, we often just look at the purposes of the church, at what the church does. Today, we are not going to spend any time on what the church does; we're going to look at who we are as the church. So, we're looking at the nature of the church, not the purpose of the church. We talk about the purpose of the church all the time. Actually, the first Sunday of every year, we launch into our new church year by explaining what it is we're doing and how that aligns with our church vision. But, as we move through this today, here's the very first big idea with the Holy Spirit that we want to see:

### **The Holy Spirit shines a spotlight on Jesus.**

We get something about lighting around here. We have a neighbor who is awesome with exterior illumination on his house. He lights up his house. You can see everything. Almost every night when we come home, I make a comment about his house. I make a comment about something that he's done. He's very passionate about his yard and his home and he's taking good care of it. In the Ozarks, we call those people retired. But, the lights are just like wow! It's always all lit up. I'm always commenting about it.

We see the same thing with billboards. You can't go north or south on Highway 65 without hundreds of billboards hitting you in the face. At night, it's the lights that make the message of the billboard known. You don't ever go down Highway 65 saying to yourself, *Look at those lights.* You're always talking about the message. And that now leads us to continuing in John 16.

**13** *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own..."* This is very important. *"...he will speak only what he hears..."* That's very important to understand. The Holy Spirit is not going to give you a word that contradicts the truth of God's word.

I get this a lot at our church. Someone will come up to me and say, "I have a word from the Lord for you." I actually had one lady that told me, "If you receive the word, I'll stay. If you reject the word, you'll never see me again." That's a great way to start a friendship right there. I don't know about you.

I said, "I'll receive what you're going to say when you say it, but understand first and foremost, I'm going to make sure you're not saying anything that goes against God's Word."

This is very important to understand. He will speak only what he hears ***"and he will tell you what is yet to come."*** Verse 14 is the spotlight shining on Jesus, the role of the Holy Spirit. **14** *"He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine."* "The Father and I are one" is what Jesus is saying. *"That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."*

James Packer puts it this way. If you've been at Woodland Hills over the last 15 years, you've probably seen this quote three, maybe four times because I just think it sums it up and it makes so much sense of this passage in John 16.

*It is as if the Spirit stands behind us, throwing light over our shoulder, on Jesus, who stands facing us. The Spirit's message to us is never, "Look at me; listen to me; come to me; get to know me," but always "Look at him, and see his glory; listen to him, and hear his word; go to him, and have life; get to know him, and taste his gift of joy and peace."* – James Packer

The Holy Spirit will never speak against God's Word. As we continue with this, I am saddened when I meet believers who maybe grew up in a church and they didn't receive a certain spiritual gift, they were maybe just diminished as a Christian because they didn't have one or two particular gifts. Other times I meet them and they're like, "I don't even know if the Holy Spirit lives within me because I didn't receive this gift." I want to make this as clear as we can today:

### **The Holy Spirit dwells in EVERY believer.**

You notice I made that all caps, which means I'm shouting at you. We're not allowed to do this anymore in email or texting or all that, but let me read it again. The Holy Spirit dwells in EVERY believer. That's as charismatic as I'm going to get, James River; I just need to let you know right there. Did you catch it? You were asleep during that point because you're used to John. So, the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer.

1 Corinthians 16 - **19** *Do you not know that your bodies are temples...* When you read the Old Testament, what is the temple? It's the sacred dwelling place of God. Follower of Jesus Christ, if you place faith alone in Christ alone, that is now you. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. ***...of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own...***

Now watch this in Ephesians 1. I love this. **13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...** It was immediate. You didn't get 10% of the Holy Spirit, you didn't get 50% of the Holy Spirit; you received the entire Holy Spirit taking up residence in your life. The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer and I'm using this word dwells very carefully because we get into a lot of confusion when we talk about the difference between dwelling and filling, so we want to clearly share this.

I love Verse 14 and I want to spend a second there. The Holy Spirit, **14 ...who is a deposit guaranteeing...** the word *guaranteeing* here has one more meaning in the Greek that I love that indicates engagement ring. I got a call this week from a lady who does not go to our church. She said can I meet with you for just a few minutes; I need to say something to you. Usually, I respond with "No." And I always love to ask, "What are we going to talk about" or "Is this a pastor spanking?" I always get nervous when people say that. And they won't tell me what they want to meet about. But, for some reason, I said okay.

She said, "I wasn't able to make it to my church last week so I tuned into yours. At the end of the message, you said something and it wasn't you; it was the Lord completely speaking to me through the Holy Spirit."

She wouldn't tell me what it was. I wanted to know what it was. We probably should have spent more time on that. But, this is why I don't stress out over teaching too much. Sometimes I know pastors feel like they have to say something that hits every single person. We need to speak truth that is accurate and clear and really trust the Holy Spirit working in the hearts and minds of people. We need to take a little bit of the burden off the communicators. He's accountable for what he says, but it's the Holy Spirit that's working this into people.

She said, "I've been engaged three times. From a very young age, I have wanted to be married." She told me about her different engagements and how they were broken off. She said, "It crushes me. And I love my parents." She's very close to her parents. She said, "I look at my dad and tell him I'm sorry he's never had the opportunity to walk me down the aisle. I don't know if it's frustration, resentment, bitterness, anger. That may not be the right wording, but it's in that category that I've dealt with for over 30 years. But, when you mentioned that one day the Father is going to turn to his son and say, 'Son, go get your bride.' At that moment, it all left me. At that moment, I realized that I will be part of a wedding one day." It's called the bride of Christ.

So, when I was reading this text this week, I sent it to her. I said, "Not only are you going to be part of a wedding one day, you've got your engagement ring. Your engagement ring is the promised Holy Spirit that you will have until the day of that wedding. This is how big this is:" ... **guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.**

The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. Now... this is where it can become confusing. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? You say, "If it dwells in every believer, what's the problem, Ted, that when you say, 'and ask the Holy Spirit to call people by name,' I don't hear that. I'm struggling. I

don't believe he is speaking to me." And "I've had these seasons in my life, Ted, where I've prayed and prayed and prayed and I've never felt the prayers get any higher than the ceiling. They barely get off my tongue and I feel like they go nowhere and nothing is happening."

Let's talk about that for just a moment. Ephesians 5 - **18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit...** And being filled with the Spirit is not an issue of your spiritual gift that we're going to look at in a second. There are three things, when we talk about the Holy Spirit, that we have to clear up. There is the fruit of the spirit, there are spiritual gifts, and then there are acts of Christians service.

Let's start with the fruit of the Spirit as we continue in Galatians 5. **19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions...** There was one commentator I read this week that said, "We want to make sure everyone knows this is not an exhaustive list." I'm wondering what we're missing. There is more to add to this list, but that's a pretty big list. He is simply making the point that you have to be careful that people don't... They're dealing with one thing in their life and they don't see it on the list, so they think they're fine. Avoiding all of this is not your salvation. Please understand that. Your salvation comes by grace, through faith. You are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. So, just stopping all of this or avoiding all of this is not it.

It goes on to say, **21 ...and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of Heaven.** Why? Because that's the fruit of the flesh. That is what the flesh produces. A born-again believer is having the Spirit renew them daily, changing them daily. "Be ye not transformed by this world, but by the renewing of your minds." Don't be drunk on wine. Instead, be filled with the spirit. He said that's the flesh, and the flesh and the Spirit are warring against one another.

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.** A couple things. These aren't spiritual gifts. We are going to get to spiritual gifts in a second. And these are not fruits of the spirit that you pick from. I want to make that clear if you are brand new. Those are seasoned Christians laughing. We need to remind them there are people in here learning this for very first time. It says fruit, singular, meaning being filled with the Spirit is not going, "Alright, this week, I'm going to work on love and I'm going to work on patience because of so and so at work, but I am a high D personality, so gentleness ain't really my thing." That's not how this works.

To the same extent that you are becoming more loving because of the Spirit's work in your life, you should be more patient. To the same extent you're finding joy in your life, when someone is driving you crazy, you should find gentleness. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Why can we rattle that off in our home? Because of children's songs. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are the collective fruit of the Spirit and it should be describing all believers.

Here's where it gets confusing. Now, when we talk about spiritual gifts, that's not what we're saying. It's a different conversation that we need to have. But, speaking of this, I like what Evangelist Dwight Moody says. *I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled.*

### **The Holy Spirit works in believers to build up the body of Christ, not just the individual Christian.**

So, now, moving from the fruit of the Spirit to spiritual gifts. We are one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one baptism. If you've ever met someone who says, "I am a born-again, Bible-believing Christian, but I don't need the church. I don't want to be a part of the church," they're missing the whole point.

In 1 Corinthians 12, ***4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And it's the Spirit that gives these gifts to the body of Christ. Christ is the one who has apportioned them, but the Spirit is distributing them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.***

We believe every follower of Jesus Christ has at least one spiritual gift or more. We call that a gift mix. My spiritual gifts are teaching, giving, and discernment. Leadership is not one of my spiritual gifts. Why I'm a senior pastor, I have no idea because leadership drains the life out of me. Meetings drain the life out of me. I enjoy pastoral care more than I do organizational leadership. But, that doesn't mean I get to avoid this organizational leadership. The leadership part of my role here as pastor is my Christian service. It doesn't mean that I get to avoid this. It's very important.

Some of you are like, "Whew, I don't have the spiritual gift of giving." But it is your act of Christian service. I don't have the spiritual gift of mercy at all. If I take the spiritual gifts assessment, I'm at zero. There is not one point assigned to the mercy column.

Amy says, "I think you may have the gift of mercy and you just don't know it."

I'm like, "Passing out at the hospital is not a spiritual gift of mercy. That is a condition that I have that I need to avoid the triggers, but it is not a spiritual gift."

Some of you are like, "Oh, I don't have the gift of helps." But, it is your act of Christian service. Some of you are like, "I don't have the gift of leadership, so I don't have to..." Understand the difference between spiritual gifts and Christian duties, responsibilities, or acts of service.

If you have no idea what I'm talking about with the spiritual gifts, I wish we had time today; it really deserves a whole series. But, if you want to begin to discover what your spiritual gift is, follower of Jesus, when you go to the message this week on the podcast or on Vimeo where you can download the home group notes, we will put our spiritual gift assessment on there to allow you to begin. I caution you that as you take the spiritual gifts assessment to not see all the things you should be doing and then make a list of things you're going to avoid. Just understand the Spiritual gifts have been placed within

us; they are the manifestation of the Spirit in our life and we are supposed to be living this out while at the same time living out these acts of Christian service, Christian duties, Christian responsibility.

I was thinking about it this week with Hurricane Harvey. I don't think there is a church in the country... If every born-again believer in the United States of America tithed, we wouldn't have to take a special offering for Harvey because all the needs would be met.

1 Corinthians 12 - ***7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.***

This is the spiritual gift. It's very important to understand to clear up this idea of spiritual gifts, and as you take that assessment that we'll put online, to please understand this.

**No one believer is given every gift.** This is so important. I've met people who believe pastors receive every spiritual gift. Not true. I can give you a list of the ones I ain't got. At the same time, **no one gift is given to every believer.** So, if you've come from a church that diminished your gift or told you if you don't have a certain gift, then you are not... No! The manifestation of the Spirit. Jesus goes away and he apportions these gifts to each believer that when you come together, people will see Jesus. That's the whole big idea. You're the foot, you're the hand, you're the mouth. You don't want to be the appendix. That's what we tell people. We can cut you out and we'll be healthier. That you don't want. We don't want an appendectomy here. But you have a part to play and your part, working with the person you're sitting next to...

Rick Warren tells this story that a guy's parent was opened up in surgery and they found cancer everywhere. He called the church. He had been going to the church for five years and he called and said, "I need Pastor Rick to come to the hospital," but he was out of town.

Pastor Rick said, "If I were there, I would be there. How about your campus pastor? Can he come and visit? Do you know who your campus pastor is?" He didn't know who his campus pastor was. "How about your small group? Can you call on them?" He wasn't in a small group. "Do you sit in the same place every week when you come to Saddleback?" He did. "What are the names of the people sitting around you?" He had no idea. He was missing the whole point. The body of Christ working together is you do your part, you do your part, you do your part, and I'll do my part. As we're doing our parts together, we have this beautiful picture of what we call the body of Christ working together.

Scripture say it this way in Ephesians 4. ***4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*** It is your role, through the Holy Spirit as he distributes these gifts, to discover what your gift is and begin using it, begin serving.

Now we move in from "I believe in the Holy Spirit" to "the holy catholic Church." Let's look at *holy*. We're going to break it down. Holy simply means set apart by God to represent him and to be separate from the evils of this world.



Catholic... When we say catholic, we are not saying Roman Catholic. It's why some of you who did creeds in the churches you grew up in replaced it to say, "holy Christian Church." The struggle I have and the reason we left the word *catholic* in is because we believe we can study this in its original context. Some of you came to me and shared that the meanings of words change and I agree with you, but I'm hoping that as a church we can have the maturity to study a word in its original context and its original meaning.

For example, there is a word that's changing, and the definition of this word is changing it seems like weekly or monthly, but I'm still going to use this word from now until the Lord returns or he takes me home and it's the word *marriage*. The word *marriage* is changing all the time. I'm still going to use that word even years from now. Thirty years from now when people are like, "Whoa, do you really believe in marriage..." because it could have a completely different meaning.

We can study the word *catholic* in its original setting and in its original context. The reason it's in the Apostles' Creed is because it means general, universal (not universalist), meaning the whole. It's all the body of believers. It's in the next line of The Creed too. "...the communion of saints." It's communion with God, communion with the saints that have gone on before us, and communion with each other, believers in Christ Jesus.

As we study this, we're talking... And you see this in Branson. There are really three terms that are thrown out with the word *church* in it. I've been in meetings this summer and with this whole idea of catholic, whenever this concept is brought up, they'll say Church, big "C." They are meaning all churches, they're meaning the 133 churches of Stone and Taney Counties. That's the catholic Church of Stone and Taney Counties. That's the universal, the whole of our counties, but it doesn't even mention that the state, the nation, and the world of all believers.

Then they'll say. "We need to talk to the local church." Woodland Hills Family Church is a local church. First Presbyterian is the local church. First Baptist is the local church. I could go through all 133, but you get the idea.

The next one is parachurch. Parachurch is a ministry. The word *Para* means to come alongside. It's supposed to come alongside the church. It has a very specific mission, a very specific purpose. We've given to a parachurch ministry to help with Harvey because Convoy of Hope is going to do a fantastic job. We have the heart to help, but, often times, as a church... We saw this in Joplin, we saw this in Haiti, we saw this with Katrina. Often times, our heart to help can create more chaos. These ministries that are targeting and know exactly how to distribute to the need...

I remember visiting Haiti shortly after the earthquake and one of the first parachurch guys we met with said, "Please don't send us anymore bottled water. We knew it was in the hearts of American Christians to send bottles of water, but what you didn't know is we have a pump on every block." So, we, as a local church, and as a Big "C" Church in Branson, Stone, Taney counties, we come to parachurches and say, "Hey, this is something you're really good at."

Here's what I love. Parachurch and local church are all part of the Big "C" Church. I can struggle sometimes with the... in this town, they call it walls between the local church and the parachurch. We've got to all remember we are part of the whole. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. I had to throw brothers and sisters in for the Baptist.

Theologian Timothy George says this: *When we say, "we believe in the holy catholic church," we are confessing that Jesus Christ himself is the church's one foundation, that all who truly trust in him as Savior and Lord are, by God's grace, members of this church, and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.* That's what we're saying.

You want more meaning out of it? We're just talking about Big "C" Church. We are a local church, a local congregation that is part of that. I love how as we move into now making this very practical in our lives, in Ephesians 5... We talk about this a lot when we speak on marriage, but I want to share it today so that we can begin to develop the heart for the Church that Jesus has for the Church. A book came out years ago called *Stop Dating the Church and Fall in Love with the Bride of Christ*.

If you were ever to come to me and go, "Ted, I really like you, but I can't stand your wife," I would roll up my sleeves or call somebody to take care of business for me; one or the other. I feel that every time I hear someone dis the church. Your dissing the bride of Christ. Here's what Jesus thinks about his bride. Here's what Jesus did for his bride.

Ephesians 5 - ***25 Husbands, love your wives...*** We're going to talk about this in a couple of weeks as we do a two-part marriage series. ***...just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church...*** On that day when the Father turns to his Son and says, "Son, go get your bride." ***...without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*** And that's because of Jesus.

When you get to that next line, saints... This word can have a lot of different meanings and a lot of different denominations. Saints, as we see it in the New Testament, when it speaks of us being saints, it's speaking of baptized believers in a local congregation.

So, let's look at some sayings. Maybe you've heard people say this. I'm always paying very close attention when people start talking about the church, good and bad, because our theology flows from our heart. What we believe about the church comes out through our mouth. The statements can be so simple, but these simple statements speak volumes to the belief. Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, and the communion of saints? Do you really believe this and do you live this out?

**"I don't need the church."** Raise your hand if you've heard somebody say, "I don't need the church." "Church for me, Ted, is my family and I taking a walk on Sunday morning." I want to go back and, not sarcastically and honestly not passive/aggressive, but I want to go, "How do you know it's not just a walk? Why do you consider that the church? And why do you not want to be connected to other believers? Help me understand that." Usually, it's someone who has been hurt by the church, someone who has seen...

The church in Houston has been just been attacked on social media this week. I have friends that lead at that church and there's probably not another church in that community that does more to help the homeless and the impoverished. They were just attacking. People are out for the church and I had to keep reminding myself the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, believers in Christ Jesus.

You may not agree with everything they teach, but we have to be careful when people start talking about the church because we deal with this thing when we're speaking of the church. There are two extremes we go to: radical inclusivism and radical exclusivism. Radical inclusivism says anybody who believes anything and serves any god, can be a part of the church. Wrong. That's radical inclusivism. Radical exclusivism is when a church becomes so stringent and they move beyond God's word and they start setting up all these other things you must do and hoops you must jump through in order to be part of the family of God.

The body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the Church is made up of born-again believers in Christ Jesus. That's who we're talking about. If you say you are a born-again believer in Christ and you place faith alone in Christ alone, you need the church and the church needs you.

I hear people say this: **"I go to church."** Now I'm going to do the worst impersonation of Hillsong's, Brian Houston that I possibly could ever do because I have a terrible Australian accent, but I love when he says, "You can't go to church when you are the church." Isn't that accent terrible? That's one of the worst accents you've ever heard. But, people say, "The church is that castle." "The church is that building that I go to." "The church is a place that I go to." No. This is a gathering of the church. This is a gathering of believers and we're not supposed to forsake this. We're supposed to be doing what we're doing today, but we want you to know the church is more than this. It's not a building. It's not a place that you go to. The church is the people of God, the family of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ.

**"It's the church I attend."** This, to me, is someone who wants the benefits and wants to be a part of it, but is kind of on the fence. "I attend that church." Some of you... And I love you. I say this from the heart of a pastor who loves you. You've attended here for ten years and yet you would relate to the story of Pastor Rick trying to find someone who could minister to that man, but that man knows no one.

And the church... We get all sorts of grief on this. People will come in and we get messages on Facebook and emails where they're like, "Man, I went into that church and nobody connected with me." We'll take half of that. What about you? Why aren't you connecting? Why aren't you going out of your way to meet someone, to share with someone, to use your gift to minister to someone, rather than sitting there waiting for someone to minister to you?

I have to say this on Labor Day Weekend with a lot of guests in town. Remember, there are hundreds of people in here today that do not consider Woodland Hills their church home, so if you get flipped off in the parking lot, don't blame this church. We told our elders and staff to stop doing that years ago. If you've been here a while, you know we're asking the members to please stop doing that. Stop cussing people out, stop cutting them off in traffic, and I'll take the lead on that. But, please understand when

we talk about the church, there's more than just the church in here today. We want this to be more than a place you just attend.

**"My church."** We want you to be able to use this term. Not in a prideful or egotistical way. I get introduced probably more often than not around this town with "Ted pastors at the church I attend." Now make this your thing when you see me in public, "Ted goes to my church." That's a great way to do it. I love it. "Yes! They said my church; free tee shirt for you!"

You're like, "Ted, that all just seems like words," but these words speak volumes of what we just declared earlier when we said we believe.

So, three things you can take away.

### **Belong**

I want to welcome 41 new church members that decided to make Woodland Hills their church home last week at Starting Point. We say welcome to you; we're glad that you're here and over at the chapel.

Belong! You say, "Okay, I've been attending long enough; it's time for me to plug in, time for me to serve." We'll continue to serve the coffee to you. We really will. We will continue to have nice, red, warm seats for you, but can I just encourage you to ask the Holy Spirit to call you by name. What are you saying about the Church? Have you been hurt by the Church? I respect the person who can get beat up a little bit and have a few bumps and bruises because of being part of a church and yet they don't give up on the Church. Jesus says the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

### **Serve**

Do you want to be a part, belong to what is happening here, belong to what is happening in the universal Church, the Big "C" Church? Serve. For some of you, it's a drop off place and you've allowed countless, maybe hundreds of people over the years to serve you and to serve your children and to serve your teenagers. It is time for you to say, Okay, if I say I believe all of this, I'm going to belong and I'm going to start using the spiritual gift that has been apportioned to me by Christ and distributed by the Holy Spirit. I'm going to discover what that is and I'm going to do something with it. I'm going to serve this local body."

### **Go**

Then in a minute here, we're going to leave this gathering until next week and some of you are going to meet in home groups and some of you are going to be meeting around coffee, some of you will be meeting in Taneycomo. You're going to be meeting everywhere. Go! Gather here as a church and then go be the church. Get out there. Get after it. In all of this, we say, "Jesus, we love you. We've declared our strong belief in you. We believe the Holy Spirit now lives within us and we want to take what I have been given and use it for the common good of the church."

At that, we're going to take the Lord's Supper and I'm going to have you prepare your elements that you were handed on the way in. If you've never placed faith alone in Christ alone, I want to encourage you not to participate in this part of the service as to not eat or drink judgment upon yourself. But, we are going to take the Lord's Supper together. I'm going to invite you to pray with me.

Father, we come to you today; we thank you that we can take the Lord's Supper together. We do this in remembrance of the death of Jesus and we will do it until he returns to come and judge the living and the dead.

Take this moment right now, right where you are, here and over and the chapel. Confess sin, examine your hearts. The list we shared earlier about the flesh, what jumped out at you, confess that before your heavenly Father. Prepare your hearts to take of the elements.

Father, we come to you with grateful hearts, examined hearts, and hearts that are prepared to take of these elements to remember the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, he took the bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

As part of the first Sunday of every month, we take a mercy offering and we know we've already talked to you about all the needs here and in Houston, but we need to continue at this because as we meet the needs around the country, we need to continue to meet needs right here in our church family. We do much in Stone and Taney Counties and around the country and around the world. The mercy offering is funds that are 100% designated to meet the physical needs of family members here at Woodland Hills. I don't want to say this is the reason you become a member of the church, but this is one of the reasons you are a member of the church. It's because we are supposed to help one another.

According to Acts 4, they sold what they had to give to those who were in need. This is part of what the church does. We call it a mercy offering and there are boxes in the back. As you leave, I just want to encourage your generosity to meet the needs of those who are gathered here today.