

# EXPLORE



## What Is the Church? Its Purpose and Identity

*At its core, the church is the global community of Christ followers who believe in the divinity and resurrection of Jesus Christ and are commissioned to proclaim the good news of His salvation to the world. The church transcends age, gender, race, geography, and socioeconomic lines.*

Joel Ryan

### Where is the Church referenced in the Bible?

The foundation for today's global church can be found in the book of Acts and the example of the early church led by the apostles of the New Testament.

The earliest apostles were mostly comprised of Jesus's 12 Disciples and closest followers during His earthly ministry. However, more than a follower, an apostle was (and is) an anointed leader commissioned by Jesus to build the church, represent His kingdom, and spread His teachings.

An apostolic ministry is distinguished by its support from leaders in the church and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus. ([Acts 1:8](#), [John 14:16](#), [1 John 2:20](#), [2 Corinthians 1:21-22](#))

Paul writes in the book of Ephesians that the ministry and teachings of the apostles are the foundation of the church with [Christ](#) as its cornerstone ([Ephesians 2:20](#)). Today, the church bears the image of Jesus Christ and carries on the ministry of Jesus to the world through the generations.

### What is the Body of Christ?

Often referred to as the Body of Christ, the church is the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ and are called by His name. It transcends age, gender, race, geography, and socioeconomic lines.

In the book of Acts, the author writes that the members of the early church frequently gathered together, "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." ([Acts 2:42](#)).

**The Body of Christ gathers together locally.**

Regular fellowship and community are therefore essential attributes of the church. No believer is intended to live out their faith alone. They have been given the Body of Christ for

encouragement, strength, and support. This is why believers are called to spend time with other believers. It is also where the idea of Sunday morning or weekly “church” comes from.

The place where Christians gather to worship God and fellowship with each other bears the name of the church, however, the true purpose of the church exists beyond the building or place of worship. Its power is found in its people and their movement in the world.

### **The Body of Christ is united globally.**

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that the individual members of the church make up the wholeness of the Body of Christ.

“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” ([1 Corinthians 12:12-13](#)).

As part of the Body of Christ, Christians are members of a much greater community. “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” ([1 Corinthians 12:26](#)).

### **Each member of the “body” is valued.**

Every member of the church, like each part of the human body, has a part to play in the spiritual Body of Christ. The church is at its strongest when everyone is contributing their individual talents and spiritual gifts to this community.

This isn’t to say that every member of the Body of Christ must think, look, or act the same. The foundation for all [Christian faith](#) must be grounded in Scripture, but there is healthy room for varying structures and different expressions of worship and ministry within the global church.

### **Each member of the “body” is imperfect.**

The Body of Christ is still comprised of imperfect people who are constantly growing and will make mistakes. It is a God-anointed community made in the image of Christ that is nonetheless imperfect in its parts. That doesn’t negate its effectiveness or purpose. The strength of the church all points to the unifying grace of God and power of His son Jesus Christ.

## **What is the Purpose of the Church?**

### **1. Proclaim the gospel.**

Jesus Christ commissioned His followers to share His ministry and proclaim the joy of salvation and forgiveness of sin to all the world. This is the primary purpose of the church today.

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)).

In this commission, Jesus instructed His followers, both current and to come, to spread the Gospel message in and beyond their local communities. “and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” ([Acts 1:8](#)).

The church, therefore, is both local and global in nature. It has many local chapters that each serve to fulfill God’s global and eternal purpose.

## **2. Equip Christians for ministry and instruct them in God’s word.**

In addition, the church exists to train and equip its members for ministry, instruct its people in the teachings of Christ and Scripture, and help believers grow closer to Jesus Christ.

Jesus reminded His followers to be the “light of the world” and the “salt of the earth” ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)).

As *light*, the church is called to represent the kingdom of God and be the living movement of Christ’s love and grace in the world.

- As Jesus said, “let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” ([Matthew 5:16](#)).
- “by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” ([John 13:35](#))

The church’s presence in the world should be the light that illuminates Christ’s love for the world.

As *salt*, the church is also called to be the moral and spiritual preservation of a broken world in need of healing. Christ’s ministry was founded on healing the sick, caring for the poor, and freeing the oppressed from guilt, shame, and spiritual bondage. For the church to be effective, it must pursue this mission as well.

When the church is grounded in the grace of God and truth of His word, its members will be the love, joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control the world desperately needs ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

The church exists to strengthen and equip its members for an external relationship with a broken world. More than an organization, the church is a life-giving movement, alive and thriving in the power of God’s grace and Christ’s free gift of salvation to all.

This article can be found online at - <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/what-is-the-church-its-purpose-and-identity.html>