

Core Beliefs

The Mission of the Church



You may have heard people say, “I love Jesus. I just don’t like the church.” That may be a cliché, but it’s true that the church has a checkered past. Its people and leaders have been involved in wars, financial crimes, sexual scandals, and even painful internal conflict. Here. It’s enough to make people swear off church, especially if you’ve been in the middle of those horrors.

That stands in stark contrast to what Jesus said about the church. When Peter announced that Jesus was the Messiah and God’s son, Jesus said, “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” ([Matthew 16:18](#)). Although this is the first time the word “church” appears in the New Testament, Jesus refers to it with other words, calling disciples, “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)). Paul would later say that God’s plan was that, “through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” ([Ephesians 3:10](#)). The church that God envisioned is much grander than many have experienced.

What Is The Church?

For many, the church is a gothic style building with stained glass and a steeple. That too is a misconception. The word church is used over one hundred times in the New Testament, long before any church buildings were built. So, what does Jesus mean when he speaks of his church?

The original Greek word we translate “church” wasn’t a religious term. It was a word in everyday use to refer to people who were “called out” or who came together for a specific purpose. When Jesus used the term, he was referring to those who came out from the world and followed him as Lord. They had a unique group identity, and they came together to support one another and to fulfill God’s mission on earth.

And they shared much more than an hour together on Sunday. In the book of Acts, we get the first glimpse of what this early community of disciples looked like.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” ([Acts 2:42-47](#))

They learned together and worshipped together. They experienced the wonder of God's miraculous presence. They supported one another, selling their property to help others in need. They spent time together in the temple courts and in one another's homes and they shared the message of Jesus and his Kingdom with others around them. This community of believers was passionately committed to Jesus and to one another.

Who Distorted the Ideal?

We did. God's plan was perfect, but since it involves flawed humans, it was sure to fall short. Just a few chapters later, in Acts 5, Ananias and Saphira tried to deceive the church by claiming to be more generous than they really were. It didn't go well for them. In chapter 6, grumbling arose when some immigrant widows thought they were not receiving the same support and care as the Jewish widows. In chapter 9, the church in Jerusalem refused to meet with a new convert named Saul, because of his reputation as a persecutor. Just seven chapters after the original description of the faithful church, it looked like the wheels were coming off.

But just because the church is flawed, doesn't mean that it is doomed. In the same way that God sees each of us through the lenses of Christ's sacrifice, he sees the church through the lenses of his glorious kingdom. He refers to it as his bride. When Paul tells Christian men that they should love their wives, he says they should do so, "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" ([Ephesians 5:25-27](#)). We may see every stain and failure of the church, but God sees it as a radiant bride.

What's So Important About The Church?

The church is valuable because Jesus believes it to be valuable. He died for the people in his church and told his disciples that he was not going to abandon them but was leaving his Spirit to nurture and protect them. As he prayed before facing his own death, his thoughts were about his followers — asking God to protect them after he was gone. Jesus was committed to this flawed community of believers, and we should be too.

The church serves several valuable purposes. First, **it confirms and defends the core truths** that give it purpose. This series of articles has explored many of those core truths, and because they are always being challenged, the church stands to affirm these unchanging beliefs.

The church is also **God's witness to the world**. It is a light to the world, sharing God's message of hope to all who will listen and to all corners of the earth. The great commission to "go into all the world" was given to the early church and is still being fulfilled by his church today.

Finally, the church is a **nurturing community of selfless support for believers**. Whether people face physical or spiritual struggles, the local family of faith rallies around other Christians to remind them that they are not alone in this journey. From Sunday worship services to front porch visits, the church is a family committed to sustaining one another until Jesus returns.

[What is the Church?](#)