

Why Believe in Christianity? Part 7:
What is the Church—and why is it important?

Basic Belief #6:

We are a part of the Church [ecclesia], the **universal Body of Christ**—all those who trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. Every **congregation** gathered around the risen Lord and empowered by His Spirit for mutual growth, encouragement, evangelism, service and worship is a **local expression of Christ's universal church**. In obedience to Christ we express our faith in Him through the signs of the New Covenant: Baptism by immersion in water and celebration of the Lord's Supper.

1. The Church is Christ's body—the extension and presence of the Resurrected Christ in the world, through the work of His Spirit, present within His people.

Having achieved our salvation, the singular agenda of the risen Christ is building, expanding, maturing and preserving His Church in the world.

Jesus said: "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"
 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter [Petros], and on this rock [petra] **I will build My church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

Matthew 16:16-18

Then Jesus came to them and said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. **Therefore go—and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

2. The greatest task and convicting witness of the Church in the world is to live in the unity of Christ's self-sacrificial love toward one another; and then together outward to the world:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. **As I have loved you, so you must love one another**. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, IF you love one another."

John 13:34-35

...that they all may become unified as one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me...I in them and You in Me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

John 17:21, 23

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward one another that Christ had—so that with one mind and one voice

you may glorify the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ. Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:5-7

In Christ, God does not have two tracks of salvation for two distinct groups.

3. In Christ, there is only one church [one body], one Gospel, one plan of salvation and only one key distinction. There are only those who are in Christ [salvation and His Spirit] and those who are not yet—which is our love-driven mission:

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is therefore neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:26-29

This mystery is that through the Gospel, the Gentiles are now heirs together with Israel, **members together of one body** and sharing together God's promise [to Abraham] in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:6

His intent was that now, **through the church**, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ephesians 3:10-12

There is **one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6

Now You [Jew and Gentile] are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is **joined together** and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being **built together** to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

Ephesians 2:20-22

4. According to Scripture, there is no such thing as a passive Christian, a passive spectator or dormant part of the body of Christ. In Christ we are all gifted by the Holy Spirit with gifts designed by Him for building up the body [community] of Christ in love—to reflect the fullness of Christ to the world.

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **to equip his people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, **we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him** who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:14-16

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same SPIRIT distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same LORD. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same GOD at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the good of all.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts **form one body**, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to **form one body**—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

5. In Christ, we are reconciled to God and to each other—and we are to be God’s reconciling peace-makers in the world:

And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and **through Him to reconcile to Himself all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, **by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.**

Colossians 1:18-20

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

Colossians 1:21-22

As you come to Him, the living Stone— rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.”

1 Peter 2:4-6

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10

6. Our LORD Jesus Christ Himself gave His people two sacraments (sacred acts), which together reflect our passage from death to life [baptism—once as an individual]; and the acceptance of our common unity around the level ground of Christ’s death for us [the LORD’s Supper—often, together as His community].

7. The LORD’s Supper reminds us that the ground is level for us all and we all stand equal before God at the foot of the Cross:

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.

Luke 22:19-20

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took 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.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:3, 4

For if we have been united with Him in a death like His,
we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His.

For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—
because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:5-7

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.

For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:8-11