

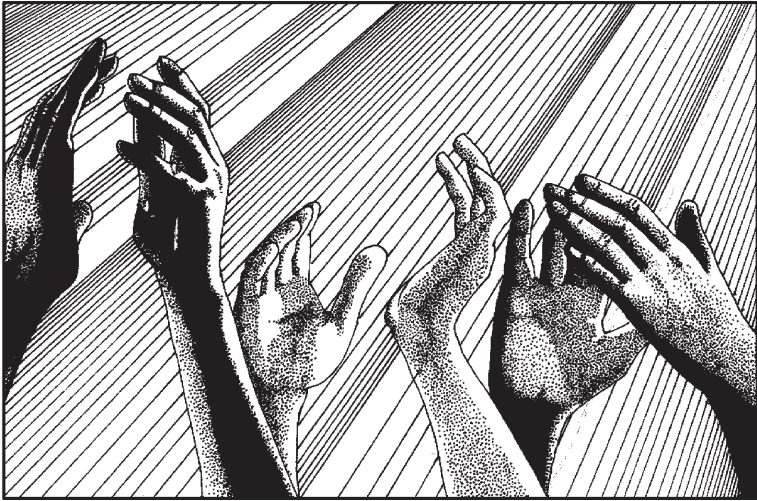
Lesson 9

The Church: The Community of God's People

Have you ever watched children playing together and noticed how they are quite naturally drawn to one another? This illustrates that man is a social creature—it is his nature to form relationships and have communion with other people who are like him. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus has established a community of like-minded people, His church, so that through it the will of God might be fulfilled. For the church is the community of God's people whose relationships with one another are based on their individual relationships with Jesus Christ.

Peter declared, "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10). We were on the outside; our sins kept us from God. However, when we accepted Jesus as our Savior, we were brought by faith into a new relationship with God through Christ. This new relationship also brought us into a new relationship with other believers. We became part of the family of God, His church.

In this lesson we will examine the instrument God has chosen to glorify Him, to nurture spiritual life, and to extend the good news to others. As we study about the church and understand its true meaning, we will be able to appreciate the value our Lord placed upon it that caused Him to give His life for it (Ephesians 5:25).



lesson outline

What the Church Is
When the Church Began
What the Church Is Like
What the Church Does

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Define the term *church* and distinguish between biblical and non-biblical definitions.
- State when the church began and support your statement with biblical evidences.
- Explain the twofold nature of the church.
- List the three basic purposes of the church and methods by which each is accomplished.

learning activities

1. As background for this lesson, read Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Romans 12; Ephesians 4:1-16; 5:22-33.
2. Work through the lesson development according to the procedures stated in Lesson 1. Be sure to look up the meanings of any key words that are new to you.

key words

barriers	dynamic	relationship
challenge	edification	social
community	functions	universal
doctrinal	ordinances	

lesson development

WHAT THE CHURCH IS

Objective 1. *Identify definitions of the term **church** as it is used in the Scriptures.*

1 Let's assume you have mentioned the word *church* to someone who has never before heard the word, and he asks you, "What does *church* mean?" Based on your own experience, write a short response to this question in your notebook.

If you are like many people today, your response to the above question was probably something like this: "A church is a place where people gather for worship." If you wanted to be more precise, you might even have said, "The word *church* refers to an organization which is made up of groups of people in different places who hold the same doctrinal views, are guided by the same rules, and have similar goals."

Both of these answers give us some idea of how the term *church* is defined by many people, and both of them could be considered as correct according to the modern understanding of the term. However, when the Bible speaks of the *church*, there is far greater significance to the term than is seen in these answers.

In fact, the Bible does not refer to certain *buildings* as being churches, as we do today, but to certain *people* as comprising the

church. Nor does it speak of the church as an *organization*. People who identify the term *church* in this way today associate it with a denomination, such as Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, or others.

In the biblical sense, there are two definitions of the word church. The root words which make up the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is translated as “church” in the New Testament, give us the picture of people who have responded to God’s call. Having responded to His call, and having confessed Jesus as Lord, they become members of His family. They are committed to the task of sharing the gospel as their Lord has instructed them. They are a *community* of obedient people who are organized to do His will. On a broad scale, this community of believers who confess Jesus as Lord represents the *universal church*, which is also called the *invisible church*. This term includes all believers everywhere who have the same faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ.

On a smaller scale, the church refers to a gathering or an assembly of people. These are believers from a given locality who share the same faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ, and who meet together for corporate worship. They are referred to as a *local church* or the *visible church*. Examples of the local church are seen in the New Testament:

Romans 1:7: “To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”

1 Corinthians 1:2: “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy”

Galatians 1:1: “To the churches in Galatia”

Philippians 1:1: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons”

Generally speaking, we can say that the church as it was referred to in the New Testament was the community of God’s people. The term *community* is important in describing the church, because it speaks of individual believers who join together for the purpose of fellowship and sharing as they worship God together. This community spirit is described in Acts 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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.

The Bible teaches that the church is the instrument God has chosen to fulfill these functions:

1. It provides for corporate worship (John 4:20-24; compare with Hebrews 10:25).
2. It provides for the spiritual growth of believers (Ephesians 4:13-16).
3. It extends the good news of salvation in Christ to other people (Matthew 16:18; 24:14; 28:18-20).

We shall look at each of these functions more fully later in the lesson.

Frequently we see the terms *church of God* or *church of Christ* in the Scriptures. These terms point out that the significant character of the assembly does not come from its members, but from its Head, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Thus, the church is a divinely created fellowship of redeemed sinners who have the same Savior. This fellowship of believers has unity because the members are one in each other and in Christ through a union brought about by the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament records that new believers were urged to follow their confession of Jesus as Lord with water baptism, which graphically signified their union with Christ (see Acts 2:38; 8:12-13; 9:1-19; 10:47-48). The new believers, who made up the local churches and who were part of the universal church, had these characteristics:

1. They were professing believers in Jesus.
2. They followed their confession of faith with baptism.
3. They were organized as a fellowshiping community as soon as possible (compare Acts 13:43 with 14:23).

4. They had a distinct purpose: to join together in corporate worship, and to do God's will.

2 Circle the letter in front of each correct completion of this statement: The biblical usage of the term *church* includes the idea of

- a) a building in which people meet to worship God.
- b) an assembly of God's people which meets together and shares a common faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ.
- c) a divinely created fellowship of believers who trust the same Savior and who are in unity with each other because of their union in Him.
- d) any religious group, organization, or denomination of any size.
- e) the total worldwide community of believers who confess a common faith in God and acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

WHEN THE CHURCH BEGAN

Objective 2. *State two biblical evidences which reveal when the church began and list seven activities of the early believers.*

The idea of the community of God's people is first seen in the Old Testament in God's promise that Abraham's family would be the means of enriching the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). The promise was confirmed at the time of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Then the concept of the community of God's people came into focus more clearly as the responsibilities and blessings of the agreement between God and Abraham were clearly spelled out (compare Exodus 19:4-6 with Genesis 22:17-18).

But Old Testament history declares that the nation of Israel failed in its mission to bless the earth by its testimony and example. Although a community of God's people existed in the Old Testament, it fell short of its intended purpose. Yet, God's purpose to call out of the world a people for Himself, to redeem them from sin, and to grant them His salvation did not fail. This purpose would be fulfilled through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the beloved Son of God.

Jesus introduced the idea of the *church* as the community of God's people during His earthly ministry. He said, speaking in the future tense, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Paul indicates in Ephesians 1:19-23 that the resurrection and ascension of our Lord had to take place before the church could be established and Jesus installed as Head of the redeemed community:

. . . which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body (vs. 20, 22-23).

The resurrection and ascension of Christ also were necessary in order for Jesus to minister as an eternal High Priest in behalf of His own people (the church). Moreover, He could also give to the church the gifts required for its operation (see Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; Ephesians 4:7-12).

3 Based on the foregoing New Testament Scriptures, which of these statements is correct?

- a) The Bible indicates that the church was established by Jesus during His ministry on earth.
- b) The Scriptures give evidence that the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus had to take place before He could establish His church.

Traditionally it is accepted that the church "officially" began on the Day of Pentecost even though the believers were meeting before this time. Let's look at the evidence:

1. Just before He ascended into heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5; read also John 14:12; 16:7-8, 13-15).

2. Jesus then promised that, once they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, the disciples would be powerful witnesses of the gospel both near and afar off (Acts 1:8).

3. True to the words of Jesus, the disciples and believers who were praying in the upper room were baptized as the Holy Spirit

descended on the Day of Pentecost and set up His residence in their lives (Acts 2:1-4; compare John 7:37-39 with 14:17).

4. In addition, on that same day 3000 people responded to the gospel message and became part of the believing community. The *church* was thus established and began to function as a praising, nurturing, and evangelizing or witnessing community.

The coming of the Holy Spirit thus marked the beginning of a new era in which believers were given divine power to witness of God's saving grace and His universal call for salvation. The book of Acts declares that from this initial day onward, the believers acted as a family or corporate unit. Here are some of the characteristics of those believers and the early church:

1. They had a doctrinal standard, which was the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42).
2. They had fellowship with other believers (Acts 2:43).
3. They observed the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42, 47; see Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
4. They met for public worship and prayer (Acts 2:46; 4:23-31).
5. They helped those in need (Acts 2:41; 4:32-35; 6:1-7).
6. They appointed men to go into other places to preach the gospel and establish communities of believers (Acts 8:14-17; 11:22).
7. They examined certain aspects of the spread of the gospel, including the people reached and the practices of new Christians; and they established essential doctrinal standards for Christians (Acts 11:1-3, 18; 15:4-35).

4 State in your notebook two things which occurred on the Day of Pentecost that give evidence that the church had its beginning on that day shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven (see Acts 2).

5 List from memory seven activities of the early believers which gave them the characteristics of a church or corporate body. Write your answer in your notebook and then compare it with the list we have given in this section. Does this list resemble the activities of your local church body?

WHAT THE CHURCH IS LIKE

Objective 3. *Recognize the characteristics that describe the nature of the church.*

When a person accepts Christ as Lord, the Holy Spirit, who brings about his salvation, also joins him to all other believers in a community which we call the church, or the *body of Christ*. In the Bible the church has been likened to a body, a bride, a building, branches on a vine, and a flock. These same figures have been applied to the individual believer, the local church, and the universal church.

6 Match the term (right) with the Scripture which describes it (left).

- | | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ... a | Luke 15:4-10 (flock) | 1) An individual believer |
| ... b | 2 Corinthians 11:2 (bride) | 2) A local assembly |
| ... c | 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (building) | 3) The universal church |
| ... d | Ephesians 1:22-23 (body) | |
| ... e | Hebrews 13:20 (flock) | |
| ... f | John 15:1-5 (branches) | |

This exercise illustrates something of the nature of the church. While an individual believer alone does not make a church, the church is a body made up of many individual believers. If we identify the church as an institution or organization, we quickly lose sight of it as a community of believers—believers who have come together in intimate relationship with one another as a result of their personal relationships with Christ. These believers minister to each other, love each other, and help each other in the Christian walk. So the nature of the church can be explained in two ways. First of all, it involves the relationships of believers to one another. Secondly, it is a visible manifestation of the believers' union with Christ.

1. *The church involves the relationships of believers to one another and to Christ.* When a sinner is faced with the gospel message, he stands alone before God. His choice to accept or

reject the gospel is a personal choice which he alone can make for himself. Whichever choice he makes, he will find that others have made the same choice. Therefore, while salvation is a very personal affair, it is not a private matter. It brings us into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and with other believers. Both are necessary for spiritual growth and the development of a Christlike nature in the individual believer.

Paul spoke of the relationship with Jesus Christ which the believer enters into at the time of salvation: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live . . . I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). He spoke of the relationship of believers with one another when he said "we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25, RSV). That is, all believers together make up the church.

Therefore, from one point of view each believer is an individual who lives in a personal relationship to Christ with personal responsibilities in his Christian life. From another point of view all believers blend together in a spiritual union which, likewise, has a relationship to Christ, together with *corporate* responsibilities to Him.

7 The Scriptures compare the relationship between Christ and the church to that between a head and its body. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:7-16, and Colossians 1:18. Based on these Scripture texts, circle the letter in front of each true statement concerning the body of Christ.

- a** There are many parts in the body of Christ.
- b** Some parts of the body are less important than other parts.
- c** An individual believer can grow to Christian maturity without being an active member of the body of Christ.
- d** Each believer is a part of Christ's body.
- e** Christ is head over everything for the church, His body.
- f** Each believer is responsible to Christ alone.
- g** If a member of the body is suffering, other members will feel his pain and suffer with him.
- h** The gifts Christ has given to the church are necessary so that each member can experience personal growth.

These Scripture passages teach us that it is no accident that in the New Testament the Christian life is a corporate experience. The new believers were quite naturally drawn together in worship, fellowship, and witness. Through the new birth their old, selfish, nature was thrown off, and they became part of a caring and sharing community.

The Bible makes it clear that being partners with other believers in a body that is responsive to the Head is a very demanding challenge. The fact is that each one of us has responsibilities that go beyond our own personal choices, our own relationship to the Head, or our own values. Now we are to function as a part of the body of Christ. That explains why Paul was concerned for the church at Corinth:

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought (1 Corinthians 1:10).

As part of the church, which as a corporate unit is related to Christ, I must be in accord with other partners in Christ if I am to be in accord with Him. The church, then, as portrayed in the Scriptures, is *people*. These people have a relationship to Christ and through Him to one another.

2. *The church is a visible manifestation of the believers' union with Christ.* God designed the church in such a way that its nature may be known through the relationships of believers. Since our relationship with Christ is a spiritual experience, the only way for it to become a visible reality is through our lives. We can, and do, tell others what we believe. If our lives are marked by kindness, selflessness, and true Christian love, people get the idea that our *invisible* association with Christ is real. However, if we don't live according to our spoken testimony, non-Christians may say, "Your actions speak so loudly that I can't hear what you say!"

This is also true in the corporate life of the community of believers. The reality of the relationship between the body (the church) and its Head (Christ Jesus) is to be seen in the life of the church. That is why Paul reminded the Ephesian believers to

“... be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3).

In Paul's time, great social barriers existed which separated Jew from Gentile and the slave from the freeborn. Apart from the gospel, there was no way these barriers could be overcome, but Ephesians 2:11-22 explains that through the cross of Christ all this is changed. He has destroyed the barrier between Jew and Gentile, making them “fellow citizens and members of God's household.” A relationship to Christ does away with social distinctions and unites all people who become part of the family of God.

As members of the same body, these people with differing social backgrounds were to be united in spirit and purpose (see Philippians 2:2). They were to be kind and compassionate to one another. Jesus gave this requirement the status of a *new commandment*: “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

So we see that the believers' relationships are to be characterized by *love*. This principle is so important that it can be used as an accurate gauge for determining one's relationship to God: “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness” (1 John 2:9). John continues:

If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:19-21).

It is for this reason that Paul rebuked the jealousy and quarreling among Corinthian Christians which led them to divide into factions and say “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos” (1 Corinthians 3:4). This is not Christian behavior, but it is the unspiritual conduct of unspiritual babes. These commands and examples help us to see that if we are out of harmony with each other, we are also out of harmony with God.

8 (Choose the best answer.) The nature of the church as a spiritual community can be defined as

- a) a group of people trying to have unity with one another.
- b) all believers in union with Christ.
- c) living out the Christian experience daily.

9 The nature of the church as a visible expression of the believer’s relationship with Christ can be defined as

- a) a spiritual bond of love for God.
- b) a place where people join together in groups according to their own social background for the purpose of worship.
- c) local assemblies of believers in a relationship of union with one another based upon love.

We see, therefore, that by nature the church is spiritual. However, it is also a practical community in which believers demonstrate their relationships to their Lord and to one another. It is thus a community of believers in which we see and experience true love. Since love is the chief characteristic of the spiritual relationship, this same love must be manifested in the local assembly:

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might love through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:8-11).

10 Based on the information in this section, state two characteristics which describe the nature of the church.

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WHAT THE CHURCH DOES

What does the church do? What are its purposes for existing? From Paul’s letter to the Ephesian believers, we learn that God brought the community of believers into existence to bring glory to His name. His overall purpose in redeeming us is that we should be “to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

The manner in which the church glorifies God is three-directional:

1. *Upward*, as believers worship Him
2. *Inward*, as believers edify one another
3. *Outward*, as believers share the gospel with unbelievers

The Church Worships God

Objective 4. *Identify true statements concerning corporate worship, and explain what we give to God in worship.*

Worship is the act in which we recognize the worthiness of God to be given reverence and praise. In corporate worship, the believers direct praise and honor to God for His gracious gifts to His people in and through our Lord Jesus. The focus of true worship is not people, but it is *God*. We worship God because of who He is (His character) and what He does.

In Lessons 1-3 of this course of study we looked at many reasons why God is worthy of our worship. Psalm 107:1-3 tells us, “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands.”

Jesus declared that God seeks for people who will worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). This means that our worship must be sincere and that it must be based upon a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is our spirit in communion with His Spirit. Through the provision of salvation, God has removed forever the barriers that would prevent our communion with God (see Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22). True Christian worship is not based on what we do for God, but it rests upon our knowledge and acceptance of what He has done for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Our worship is not like that of pagans who worship gods made of wood or stone. Their worship is intended to pacify the anger of their gods or to gain favor with them. However, when God's people worship Him, they recognize that He has freely offered mercy and grace to them (Psalm 118:1). Worship is a grateful expression of thanks to God for His grace. It includes both praise and adoration.

While we can and often do worship God privately, it is important to realize the value of corporate worship, which is a *symphony* of praise to God. As God's family gathers in His presence to glorify Him, each believer is able to realize the oneness of the people of God. There is a spiritual *dynamic* in corporate worship that a person cannot experience alone. This means that there is spiritual power as we join together in worship that benefits and strengthens each worshiper. I am helped in my worship of God as I experience worship with other believers. That is why the Scriptures urge us, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

In corporate worship, the church, under the direction of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the Word of God, seeks to glorify God through various means, such as song, prayer, and the ministry of the Word. It is important to note that simply going through the forms of worship does not mean that we have worshipped. We can enjoy the beauty of music, the ability of the preacher, or the pleasure of being with other people and yet fail to worship God. Remember that the primary purpose of all true worship is to glorify God. He must be the center of our worship.

Corporate worship is illustrated many times in the Bible. Let us look at a few examples:

Nehemiah 8:6: "Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

2 Chronicles 29:28: "The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played."

Acts 2:46-47: "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"

Revelation 5:13: "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is

in them, singing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!'"

In addition to singing, praying, and praising God, the church also worships together in observing the two ordinances commanded by Jesus: water baptism and the Lord's Supper. In water baptism, new believers are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as a sign of inner change. The Lord's Supper was to be observed, Jesus said, "in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Obedience in observing these ordinances is an act of corporate worship. (See Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.)

11 Which of these are **TRUE** statements concerning corporate worship? Circle the letter in front of the answers you choose.

- a** The purpose of corporate worship is to satisfy God's anger and win His favor.
- b** Worship in spirit and truth requires sincerity and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- c** Corporate worship draws believers together in unity and power.
- d** Spiritual worship is always centered on God.
- e** Corporate worship is illustrated and commanded in the Scriptures.

12 Name three words that explain what we give to God in worship.

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The Church Edifies Itself

Objective 5. *Explain the meaning of the term **edify** and what relationship there is between the gifts and fruit of the Spirit and the church.*

One fact becomes apparent to us as we examine scriptural evidence concerning the functions of the church: God insists on dealing with believers in *community*. We understand this community function better when we associate the church with

the concept of the body. The Scriptures use the illustration of the body to explain the functions of the church, the spiritual body (see Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; and Ephesians 4:7-16). Every member and his contribution are important to the healthy functioning of the body.

The human body is a very complex organism. It has many parts, each of which has a different function. The body of Christ likewise has many members. Each member has one or more gifts or abilities that enable him to contribute to the well-being of the whole body. What are these gifts? A listing of them will show the great variety of gifts available to the members of the body of Christ.

1. Romans 12:4-8: Prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, showing mercy.
2. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: The message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues. (See also vs. 28-30.)

It is important to emphasize that gifted individuals are given to the *church*, the *community* of believers, “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12). This means that believers live in relationship with each other, dependent upon one another. Each member of Christ’s body has a service, a talent, or some special contribution to make; and each needs the contribution of the other members. For the collective members of the body God has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11).

It is also important to note that the body of Christ is a *spiritual organism* which is united with Christ. This means that it is more than a collection of individuals. Those who believe in Christ are joined together in His body because they are joined with the Head. The unity, we should always remember, comes from Christ alone. *Because members belong to Christ, they also belong to each other.* The body lives to serve the Head. In the human body, when the brain is dead there is no need for the

body. If Christ is not given His place as our Head, there is no need for the body. Jesus said to the church in Sardis, "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" (Revelation 3:1). The church must maintain its relationship with the Head, Jesus Christ, in worship, so that it can edify itself. To *edify* means "to instruct or improve spiritually, to build up or establish."

God has provided for harmony in this spiritual organism, the church. As the parts of the human body respond to the needs of each part, so the spiritual body responds to the needs of individual believers. If one member suffers, the others share the pain; if one rejoices, the others share the joy (1 Corinthians 12:24-26). The reason is this: "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 4:16).

The process of building up the body sometimes means that the church must purify itself. This may require the discipline of a member who has sinned. Jesus talked about this (Matthew 18:15-20) and gave instructions for dealing with such persons in a spirit of love. However, if they refuse to listen and repent, they are to be expelled from the community of believers (see also 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 for an example).

It is in the believer's relationships with other members of the body of Christ that the Holy Spirit produces His fruit in the believer. The fruit of the Spirit, listed in Galatians 5:22-23, refers to the characteristics of Christ that develop as we form relationships with one another. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

13 Complete the following sentences:

- a The church *edifies* itself. To *edify* means to
- b The relationship between the gifts of the Spirit and the church is that
- c The relationship between the fruit of the Spirit and the church is that

Christianity is not a lonesome or solitary walk. A reading of the book of Acts reveals that the body of Christ is a busy, worshipping, sharing fellowship of believers united for the purpose of glorifying God, growing in His love, and bringing others into His kingdom. The church is for those who are committed to the growth, development, and maturing of the members of the body of Christ. When this happens, then it is ready to carry out its third function: sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

The Church Evangelizes the World

Objective 6. *Explain how the teachings of Jesus concerning the church's mission should be put into practice.*

Jesus' first command to needy people is "Come" (Matthew 11:28). Once they have experienced his forgiveness and acceptance they are challenged to "Go" (Matthew 28:19). As the community of involved believers in each locality is built up in the faith, it must turn its energies outward to the non-believing world. God uses *people* to win people! The church glorifies God as believers share the gospel with others; they engage in evangelism. The word *evangelism* literally means "the declaration of the gospel." The responsibility and the privilege of the church is to make known God's provision of salvation to all people.

Believers are called out of the world in the sense that they are no longer to be controlled by its values and loyalties. Nevertheless, they are challenged to *take* the gospel to the world of non-Christians. Jesus prayed to the Father, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:16, 18). Believers are to separate themselves from the non-Christian lifestyle and yet be involved in changing it. Because Christians are *sent*, we have the idea of *mission*.

The New Testament gives us the scope of evangelism in Matthew 13:38. Jesus declares that "the field is the world." He challenged His followers with these words: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded" (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). The church is thus obligated to share the gospel with people everywhere.

The responsibility for evangelism is not a matter of choice with Christians. Jesus said that when believers received the power of the Holy Spirit, they would be dynamic witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). God is glorified when people are saved and added to the body of Christ, for in this process Christians truly become the productive, fruit-bearing believers Christ intended for them to be (John 15:1-8).

14 The book of Acts gives us some insights as to how we should look at our responsibility of spreading the gospel. Read these verses and state what the apostles’ reaction was in each instance:

- a** Acts 4:16-20:
- b** Acts 4:31:
- c** Acts 5:40-42:

As of 1994, there were over 5.6 billion people on the earth. It is estimated that about two-thirds of them have not had an adequate witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord of the harvest has challenged us to declare His good news to them. He is pouring out His Spirit upon His servants throughout the world, urging them to give themselves to the unfinished task of evangelism. He has equipped the church not only with the power of the Spirit but also with effective tools so that it may accomplish its mission: radio, television, literature, and mass evangelism meetings (in some cultures). The gospel is being declared on a broader scale than ever before through these means. Nevertheless, the greatest means of evangelizing the people of the world rests on the effective witnessing and the Christlike example of each believer in his respective place.

Our goal, then, should be to see that each person who is won to Christ and brought out of the world be challenged to return to the world as an ambassador for Christ. With new convictions and new standards, each believer is intended by God to reenter the world as His representative, offering salvation to all people. In this way, the church can carry out its mission obediently and effectively, bringing glory to God in the process.

15 Answer these questions briefly:

- a** What is Christ’s command to the sinner (one word)?
- b** What is Christ’s command to the believer (one word)?
- c** What is the most important thing Jesus has given to the church for carrying out its mission?
- d** Whom does God use to win the lost?.....
- e** Jesus said that believers are not *of* the world. What did He mean?
- f** What did He mean by saying that believers are *in* the world?
- g** Examples of the apostles in the book of Acts teach us that, in regard to its mission, the church should have what attitude?

self-test

MULTIPLE CHOICE. Select the one best answer to each question.

- 1** The biblical usage of the term *church* refers to
 - a) a group of people with similar beliefs.
 - b) a community of people who have responded to God's call.
 - c) a place where people meet together to worship.
 - d) groups of people who have the same doctrinal views.

- 2** The biblical example of the church as a body with many parts indicates that
 - a) people meeting together in God's name make up a church.
 - b) each person in relationship with Christ is His church.
 - c) the church includes many people in relationships with one another because of their individual relationships with Christ.
 - d) each assembly is organized in the same way as all others.

- 3** The local or visible church refers to
 - a) the entire body of Christ.
 - b) believers from a given place who share faith in Jesus Christ and who meet together for worship.
 - c) all believers from one denomination.
 - d) the universal church.

- 4** The term *community* gives the idea of
 - a) government.
 - b) an invisible church.
 - c) people with different ideas about doing things.
 - d) sharing and having fellowship together.

- 5** The Bible gives evidence that the church began
 - a) during the ministry of Jesus on earth.
 - b) at the time of the ascension of Jesus.
 - c) on the day of Pentecost.
 - d) after the conversion of Paul.

- 6** The spiritual nature of the church is visibly manifested in
- a) the believers’ demonstration of unity and love for one another.
 - b) Christ’s living in the hearts of believers.
 - c) the gifts of the Spirit.
 - d) singing, praying, and preaching.

- 7** What is the best proof that a person loves God?
- a) He loves other people.
 - b) He spends many hours in prayer and worship.
 - c) He becomes a member of a local church.
 - d) He witnesses to unbelievers.

- 8** The Bible teaches that the gifts of the Spirit are given to
- a) any individual who wants to have a personal ministry.
 - b) the church for its edification, operating through believers as they minister to one another.
 - c) help the church evangelize the world.
 - d) produce a Christlike character in gifted people.

- 9** In the example of the church as the body of Christ, we learn that the church’s character should come from its
- a) members.
 - b) works.
 - c) Head.
 - d) communion and fellowship.

10 SHORT ANSWER. Explain what the purpose of the church is in relation to each of these:

- a** In relation to God:
- b** In relation to itself:
- c** In relation to the world:

answers to study questions

- 8** b) all believers in union with Christ.
- 1** Your answer.
- 9** c) local assemblies of believers in a relationship of union with one another based on love.
- 2** You should have circled letters b), c), and e).
- 10** It is a love relationship between believers and Christ. It is a love relationship of believers for one another.
- 3** b) The Scriptures give evidence that the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus had to take place before He could establish His church.
- 11** All are true except **a**.
- 4** The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had promised. About 3000 people accepted the message of the gospel and were added to the number of believers.
- 12** Any of these: Glory, honor, reverence, praise, thanks, obedience.
- 5** Compare your answer with our list in this section, and then compare it with the functions in your local church body.
- 13** Your answers should be similar to these:
- a** build up, establish, instruct, improve, strengthen, or discipline.
 - b** the gifts are given to the church, or for the benefit of the church as a whole. It is in corporate worship that the gifts are manifested.
 - c** the Spirit produces His fruit in us through our relationships with others. Spiritual fruit cannot grow apart from relationships.
- 6** **a** 1) An individual believer.
b 2) A local assembly.
c 2) A local assembly.
d 3) The universal church.
e 3) The universal church.

f 1) An individual believer.

14 a They could not help but speak about what they had seen and heard.

b They spoke the word of God boldly.

c They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

7 a, d, e, g, and h are true.

15 a Come.

b Go.

c The Holy Spirit.

d Believers (the church).

e That believers have separated themselves from the life-style of the world and are no longer controlled by it.

f Believers have a mission to save the world, or to evangelize it.

g An attitude that it must do everything possible to preach the gospel to all the world.

