

# Lesson 3

---

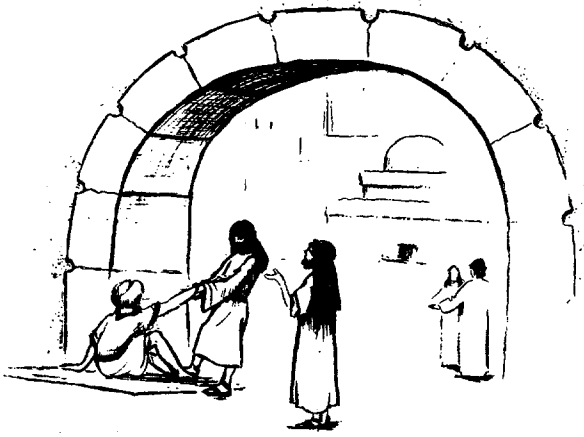
## A Universal Church

The Italian artist Raphael painted the scene of the Transfiguration described in Matthew 17. It shows the Lord on a high mountain. His face is shining like the sun, and his clothes are dazzling white. Moses is on one side of Jesus and Elijah on the other. Three disciples are kneeling nearby in worship.

Raphael's painting shows a young epileptic boy at the bottom of the mountain against a dark background. A small crowd has gathered around the boy. His parents are there wanting the other disciples to heal their son. The disciples stand there helplessly while their enemies mock them.

This is the picture that many have of the church. Christ is far away on some mountaintop. He is surrounded by a few special people who have escaped from the valleys of life. At the foot of the mountain is a world sick and in great need of healing, with no one to help it.

This lesson will give you *another* picture of the church. The picture you will get is of a church which is very much involved in the world. It is a church that puts into action all of the Father's plan and Christ's purpose in the world. The Holy Spirit has made of the church a temple to dwell in the world to complete the redemptive plan of God.



## **lesson outline**

God's Instrument

Christ's Purpose

The Church's Ministry

## **lesson objectives**

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Explain the nature and ministry of the church.
- Understand the terms *local* or *visible* and *universal* or *invisible* as they relate to the church.
- Describe the relationship of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to the church.

## **learning activities**

1. Study the lesson following the procedure given in Lesson 1. Read all Scripture texts, and answer all study questions before checking your answers.
2. Take the self-test at the end of the lesson and check your answers.
3. Review Lessons 1-3, then answer the questions in Unit Student Report 1.

**key words**

clergy	manifestation
edification	ministry
edify	organism
invisible	purification
laity	synagogue

**lesson development****GOD’S INSTRUMENT**

**Objective 1.** *Explain the meaning of the word church as it applies to the Christian.*

In Lessons 1 and 2 we discussed the redemptive plan of God. We also learned that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all very much involved in the salvation of the world. Now we will talk about the church and how it fits into the redemptive plan.

First we will find out what the church *is*. We need to understand that the church is God’s creation and His unique possession through Christ. Then we want to see what the church is supposed to do. Because of what the church *is*, it has a special purpose in the world. We will see what that purpose or mission is.

**The Meaning of the Word Church**

The word used in the New Testament for *church* is the word *ekklesia*, which means “to call out from” or “the called-out ones.” It can also mean “called unto.”

In the simplest terms *the church is God’s people*. It is the believers who have been called out of the world by means of the gospel of Christ. These believers maintain a personal relationship with Christ by faith and are united to the body of believers by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

The church is the “gathering of God’s first-born sons, whose names are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). This means that experiencing the new birth is the first condition for becoming a part of the church. The second is the joining of one believer with

others into one body by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). These are the first steps in becoming a part of the church.

- 1** To experience the new birth means to
  - a) become sinless.
  - b) accept Christ as Savior and Redeemer.
  - c) die and be resurrected.
- 2** Which of these statements are TRUE?
  - a** The concept of being “called-out ones” indicates that the Christian has turned away from his old life of sin and has come into a new life in Christ.
  - b** The main purpose of the church is to separate the believer from the sinner.
  - c** The church unites the body of believers to fulfill its mission to the world.

The Bible speaks of the church in two ways. First, it speaks of a *universal* church. Christ said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). He did not say “churches.” He was speaking of one church—those who have been born of the Spirit of God and who have by the same Spirit been baptized into the body of Christ (1 Peter 1:3, 22-25). The universal church represents believers and members of the body of Christ in all places and all ages. Some call this the *church invisible*, but actually the church has never been invisible, because it is people, real live people.

The Bible also speaks of a *local* church. In the local sense the word *church* is used of a group of believers in any one locality or place. The local church is the local expression of the universal church. Thus we read of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1, 11:22), the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1), or the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1). The local churches together ought to be a good example of the true church, the universal church.

The church at its very beginning sprang up in a most simple way. At first there was no organization, but merely a simple bond of love, fellowship, and cooperation. This quickly changed. It became more organized by the believers who felt a need to join efforts with others in making known the gospel of Christ to unbelievers.

At first there was but one local church in Jerusalem. The membership grew to 3000 and then 5000 as the Lord added to the church daily (Acts 2:47). More local churches became necessary elsewhere to meet the needs of other new members in the body of Christ. New churches were established wherever the gospel was preached, such as in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8).

From these early days of the church to the present, believers have seen that it is good to join fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. This has resulted in the local church. But it must not be forgotten that the *universal* church reveals itself in the visible, or *local*, church. The church is in existence wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ (Matthew 18:20).

**3** From the list below select the correct ending for each sentence and write it in the blank space. Some endings will be used more than once.

- 1) new birth
- 2) universal church
- 3) gospel of Christ
- 4) uniting with other believers
- 5) local church

- a** The church is God’s people who have been called out of the world by means of the .....
- b** The two conditions for becoming a part of the church are the ..... and .....
- c** Another term for the *invisible church* is the .....
- d** Another term for the *visible church* is the .....
- e** When believers join together in one place at specific times they are called the .....

f Believers from all places throughout all history make up the

.....

4 Are you a member of the universal church?.....

Are you a member of a local church?.....

**Divine in Origin**

**Objective 2.** Describe the divine nature of the church.

*The church is a divine creation.* It is unique because it is a special people called out by God. God has called everyone to repentance. The sinner who responds to God’s call becomes a new creature in Christ. The born-again believer becomes part of a new family—the family of God, or the church. The church is born of God, and not by the work of any man. The church is not *organized*—it is *born*. It is not the product of man’s efforts, but it is the product of man’s birth into the kingdom of God.

*The church is a divine possession.* The church is “God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9). It belongs to God. He was the one who paid the price to purchase it through Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). The church belongs to God to be used by Him for His eternal purposes. This does not mean that it is a lifeless object or tool in God’s hand. The church has value to God because it is through the church that the “angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world . . . learn of his wisdom in all its different forms” (Ephesians 3:10). The church, in other words, is the living example to the world that God is able to redeem from sin. God, the Creator and Savior of the world, restores His people to fellowship with Him, and He enjoys a special relationship with them.



**WE BELONG TO HIM**

You will understand this special relationship better as you read the following Scriptures. These Scriptures will help you to know more about the nature and meaning of the church and its relationship with God.

5 Read each verse and write the name used for the church.

a Ephesians 2:19: .....

b Ephesians 2:21: .....

c 1 Timothy 3:15: .....

d 1 Peter 2:5, 9: .....

e 1 Peter 5:3-4: .....

6 Why is the church a divine creation?

.....  
.....

7 Why is the church a divine possession?

.....  
.....

**CHRIST’S PURPOSE**

**Objective 3.** Give four examples of how the church is involved in Christ’s redemptive purpose.

We have talked about the meaning and origin of the church. It was God’s will and design that brought the church into existence. In the plan of God, Christ was to redeem the world through His sacrifice. But Christ was not to accomplish the entire plan of redemption alone (Matthew 28:18-20). The plan calls for the members of His church to be the agents or messengers to accomplish Christ’s eternal purpose.

The plan of God may be stated simply in the following manner:

1. God the Father planned the redemption of mankind.
2. Jesus the Son of God revealed God’s plan and paid the price.

3. The Holy Spirit formed the church to accomplish the divine purposes of the Father and the Son.
4. The church fulfills the purpose of the Father and the Son by the ministry of its members, through the Holy Spirit, to the world.

Two things are brought up at this point. One is the special relationship between Christ and His church, that is, the unity or “oneness” of Christ and the church. The other is the means by which this unity takes place. The Holy Spirit provides the grace for the believers to be united in Christ, and He also makes effective the ministry of each member of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8). Here are some examples of these two ideas:

1. *The church is the body of Christ.* This means that Christ and the church are one, as the head and the body are one. There is a necessary and living relationship between Christ and His church. The apostle Paul uses the example of the body and says, “No one ever hates his own body. Instead, he feeds it and takes care of it, just as Christ does the church; for we are members of his body” (Ephesians 5:29-30).

The church, as a body, is the *visible manifestation* of Christ. This means the church shows to the world what Christ is like. The body of Christ is a fellowship of people who are united in a common faith, a common worship, and a common love. This faith, worship, and love are centered around the head of the church, which is Christ. The people who make up the church are bound together because of the work of Christ (Ephesians 2:21-22; 5:30; 1 Corinthians 12:27).

2. *The church is the bride of Christ.* The church has been compared to a bride awaiting her bridegroom. The church is waiting for the return of Christ, the Bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20, 2 Corinthians 11:2). Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). Christ is preparing the church during these days. He is to present it spotless at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:5-10).

3. *The church is the community of the Holy Spirit.* The church was created on the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit



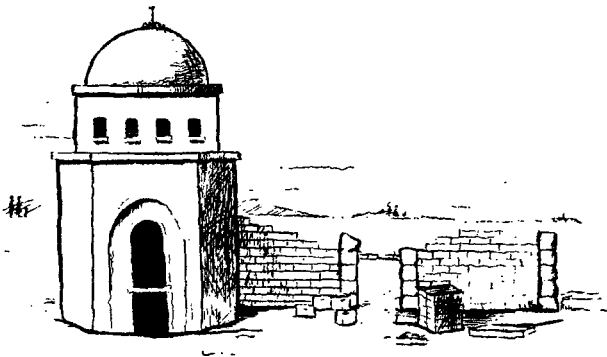
gave birth to the church in order to fulfill Christ's mission. The church has become the temple of the Holy Spirit that God might dwell on the earth. The Holy Spirit has acted and continues to act creatively. He was present at the creation of Adam, and He is present in the church, which is a new creation of God.

The creation of the fellowship for worship and service was the work of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit brought all believers together. There was communion (Acts 2:43-47). There was unity and fellowship in the church as there is between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit brought a deep spiritual community in Christ among believers.

The Holy Spirit is actively adding members to the body of Christ. Through the church, He is reaching out to bring others into the community of believers. It was Christ's wish that none should be destroyed (2 Peter 3:9).

While the church is still in the world, the Holy Spirit will be actively baptizing believers into the body of Christ and He will be baptizing the members of the church for service. It is through the church that the Spirit carries out the eternal purpose of God.

4. *The church members are living stones.* It was mentioned before that the church is called the temple of the Holy Spirit. The living Spirit of God dwells in the total building. But the building itself is a spiritual building made up of living stones (1 Peter 2:5). *We are those living stones!*



The Holy Spirit gives life to the church and sustains or keeps it. The church is a living organism. The Holy Spirit is the living power of the church. The church is not made up of “dead stones” but live ones. There is community, unity, and the sharing of needs and blessings. The church is very much alive and moving when it is doing God’s will through the Holy Spirit.

**8** Without looking back at the lesson, list the four steps in the plan of God. (Write this in your notebook.)

**9** We have seen that the church is involved in Christ’s redemptive purpose. How is each of these descriptions of the church related to that idea?

**a** The church is the body of Christ.

.....  
.....

**b** The church is the visible manifestation of Christ.

.....  
.....

**c** The church is the bride of Christ.

.....  
.....

**d** The church is the community of the Holy Spirit.

.....  
.....

**e** The church members are living stones.

.....  
.....

## THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY

**Objective 4.** *Identify true statements which explain the meaning of the word ministry as it relates to the church.*

*Ministry* is the natural result of the character of the church. The ministry of the church is encouraged by the Holy Spirit. But more than that, the ministry of the church flows from within the character and nature of the church. Just as eating is natural to people, ministry is natural to the church.



One of the first things a newborn believer wants to do is to serve God. Because of the joy of salvation and our appreciation to the Lord for our salvation, we want to do something in return. This is very normal and natural, just as eating is natural to a baby. But the baby needs some training as to what to eat and how to eat it. So do believers need to know what is involved in ministry.

### What Is *Ministry*?

The most common word used to define *ministry* is the word *service*. To minister is to serve. To do a service for someone is to minister to that person. This is ministry in the most general sense of the word. In a more specific way, the word *minister* includes several aspects which will help us to understand what the church is to do.

In the Old Testament, the word *minister* meant a domestic (household) servant (1 Kings 10:5). It could also refer to one who served in the temple. The idea is of someone who assists another person. Joshua was a minister to Moses (Exodus 24:13, 33:11).

Elisha assisted Elijah (1 Kings 19:21). The priests and Levites were ministers of God in the temple (Exodus 28:35; 1 Kings 8:11).

In the New Testament, the original Greek word used is *diakonos*. This word also has the meaning of “servant.” The minister of the synagogue in Nazareth was an attendant (Luke 4:20). John Mark was a minister to Paul and Barnabas, that is, their assistant. Jesus used the word when He said, “Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am” (John 12:26). As the church grew, its ministry was performed by various types of workers having several functions, but all were ministering servants of God (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). The term includes the idea of performing a spiritual service.

The church is called to the ministry of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The minister is one called by God to a place of responsibility. Whose responsibility is it to minister?

Two Scripture passages will help us to find the answer. The first is 1 Peter 5:1-3:

I, who am an elder myself, appeal to the church elders among you. I am a witness of Christ’s sufferings, and I will share in the glory that will be revealed. I appeal to you to be shepherds of the flock that God gave you and to take care of it willingly, as God wants you to, and not unwillingly. Do your work, not for mere pay, but from a real desire to serve. Do not try to rule over those who have been put in your care, but be examples to the flock.

This Scripture refers to the leaders of the body, who have been called of God to give *all* of their time and effort to this ministry. They are sometimes called the *clergy*.

Now let us look at 1 Peter 2:9-10.

But you are the chosen race, the King’s priests, the holy nation, God’s own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light. At one time you were not God’s people, but now you are his people; at one time you did not know God’s mercy, but now you have received his mercy.

This Scripture refers to *all* believers. It includes those members of the body who earn their living in many types of occupations outside of the church. They are sometimes called the *laity*, or *laypersons*. Most of us make up this part of the body of Christ. But as part of God's church, we are all responsible to be involved in the ministries of the church. We are *all* "the King's priests . . . chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God."

**10** Which of these statements are TRUE explanations of *ministry* as it relates to the church?

- a** One who ministers is a servant or assistant to others.
- b** The church's ministers are always members of the clergy.
- c** The very character of the church leads it into ministry.
- d** The laity is not expected to perform ministries in the church.
- e** God expects all believers to be involved in ministries.
- f** The term *ministry* includes the idea of performing a spiritual service.
- g** Each minister should be able to perform all of the ministries of the church.

### **How Do We Minister?**

**Objective 5.** *Apply the principle of "servant" ministry to your ministry in the church.*

The Christian who ministers must devote himself to following the pattern of Christ. Christ came not to receive service but to give it (Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45). Christ Himself said, "I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you" (John 13:15). That is what Paul was talking about when he wrote to the church, "God in his mercy has given us this work [ministry] to do, and so we do not become discouraged" (2 Corinthians 4:1).

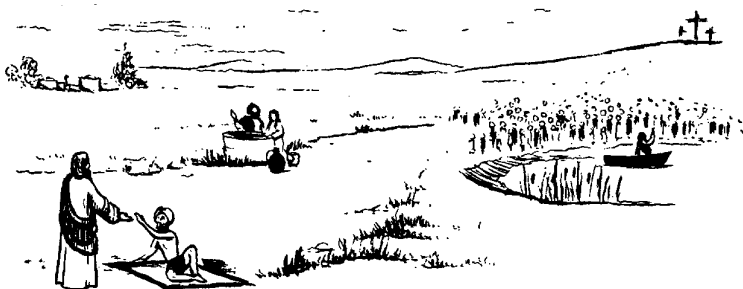
The minister of Christ, following the example of his Master, gives a humble but loving service to help other people who are in need. In His first sermon at His home synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people (Luke 4:18-19).

**11** As the body of Christ, our ministry to the world should be like His. To help you remember how He saw His mission, memorize the Scripture given above. Put an **X** on this line when you have done so .....

Jesus announced publicly that He was taking the role of a servant. He never denied His services to needy people. In the streets He found the despised and the downcast and gave back to them their dignity as human beings in the sight of God. People brought their sick to Him, and He healed them in body and spirit. A publican needing to recover his self-respect—a beggar needing to recover his sight—a rich man worried about his soul—a fisherman worried about his luck—a leper crying “Unclean!”—or a woman who had sinned—whoever needed Jesus was not turned away. Many times His body was tired, as He spent Himself in service for others. But He kept giving of Himself all the way to the cross!



Jesus passed on His servant-ministry to His disciples. He showed them the road to greatness in the kingdom of God when He said, “Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Again He said, “If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest” (Mark 10:43). Just hours before dying on the cross, Christ pointed out, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). To show what He meant, He washed everybody’s feet. He did this to show the role of a servant.

Here are four things which can be said about a servant:

1. He is someone who works in somebody else’s house.
2. He ministers to somebody else’s needs.
3. He works at somebody else’s convenience.
4. He does not expect to be thanked for what he has done.

So “it is the same with you; when you have done all you have been told to do, say, ‘We are ordinary servants; we have only done our duty’” (Luke 17:10). Christ was our example in His own ministry. We have been given the wonderful privilege of ministering as He ministered!

Jesus came to earth as a humble, obedient servant. But what did God think of Jesus? The apostle Paul gives the answer in Philippians 2:9-10:

For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honor of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

To His obedient Son, God gave a glory greater than the world can ever give—the adoring worship of the whole universe. This could be a figure of what God has in store for an obedient, servant church.

**12** Review this section and the four things which are said about a servant. How can you apply the principle of “servant” ministry to your ministry in the church?

.....

.....

**What Is Our Ministry?**

**Objective 6.** *Explain what is involved in our ministry to the Lord, to other members of the church, and to the world.*

In general, the ministry of the church is divided into three parts: 1) it is called to serve God and worship Him; 2) it has a

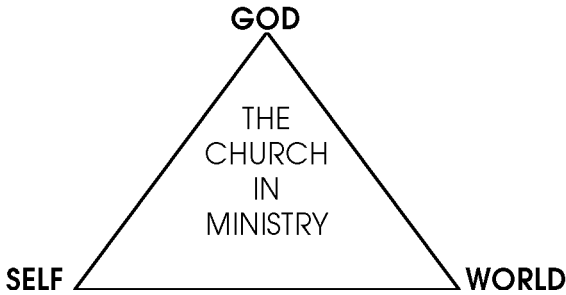
ministry to its own members; 3) it has a ministry to the world of unbelievers. These three ministries of the church will be considered in more detail in later lessons. I will just give a brief explanation of each in this lesson.

1. *The church ministers to the Lord.* The term translated “While they were serving the Lord . . .” in Acts 13:2 means “worshiping the Lord.” True ministry to the Lord is true worship. This is the primary purpose of the church and its members (Romans 15:6, 9; Ephesians 1:5, 6, 12, 14; 3:21). God’s eternal purpose is to draw man closer to Him. In worship the redeemed man (in Christ) draws closer to God (Ephesians 2:13). When we worship we give God honor and reverence as the father of the universe. The words “Our Lord and God! You are worthy to receive glory, honor, and power” and other such expressions show us the central meaning of worship (Revelation 4:11).

2. *The church ministers to its own members.* The church has the responsibility and privilege to minister to itself. “It was He who gave gifts to mankind . . . He did this to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). The church’s service is *inward* to herself in edification, purification, education, and discipline. This means the church has the responsibility to build up (edify) its members, to keep itself pure, to train, and to discipline the members of the body. The goal of God for the church is expressed in Ephesians 4:13: “And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ’s full stature” (KJV).

3. *The church ministers to the world.* The church must move *outward* to the world in evangelization. The world is the earth and all its people. From the very beginning, since man fell into sin, it has been God’s plan to make salvation available to all mankind. The Great Commission, as spoken by the Lord in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15, directs the church to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. The church is to evangelize *all the world*—beginning with its own community, and reaching out to include every person of every tribe and nation.





So we see that the universal church is God at work in people through the Holy Spirit. The church is the called-out ones whose lives are given in service for the glory of Jesus Christ. The church is alive and moving with a purpose to minister to the Lord, to the membership of the body, and to the world. The church acts for God in worship, in service, and in witness.

**13** Explain briefly how the church ministers to the Lord.

.....  
.....

**14** List four ways the church ministers to its own members.

.....  
.....

**15** In what way can the church minister to the world?

.....

After you take the self-test for this lesson, review the material in Lessons 1 through 3. Then answer the questions in Unit Student Report 1 before you begin the next unit of study.

**self-test**

SHORT ANSWER. Answer these questions as briefly as possible.

**1** Explain the relationship between the local church and the universal church.

.....  
.....

**2** Why is the universal church sometimes called the *invisible* church?

.....  
.....

**3** God's role in the establishment of the church can be described by saying that He

.....  
.....

**4** Christ's relationship to the church is

.....  
.....

**5** The Holy Spirit's involvement with the church is that He

.....  
.....

**6** Describe three ways in which the church ministers.

.....  
.....

**7** As a member of the body of Christ, have you ministered in any of these ways? Write the ways you have ministered.

.....  
.....

**8** Now write down any areas in which you would like to increase your personal ministry as a member of the body of Christ.

.....  
.....

## **answers to study questions**

**8** God the Father planned how man was to be redeemed. Jesus revealed the plan and became the sacrifice (paid the price). The Holy Spirit brought the church into being to accomplish God's plan. The church fulfills the plan through ministry to the world.

**1 b)** accept Christ as Savior and Redeemer.

**9** In your own words:

**a** As members of His body we are one with Him, we are united with Him. (We have a restored fellowship with God.)

**b** The church represents Christ to a sinful world. Christ's sacrifice binds us together.

**c** Christ is preparing the church for eternal fellowship with Him. The church is like a bride awaiting her bridegroom, to be presented spotless before God.

**d** The Holy Spirit gives the power and grace for the members of the body of Christ to work together in unity and fellowship to fulfill God's plan.

**e** As "living stones" which make up God's temple in the world, we have the Holy Spirit living within us to give us life and keep us. We do God's will through the power of the Holy Spirit

**2 a** True.

**b** False.

**c** True.

**10 a** True.

**b** False.

**c** True.

**d** False.

**e** True.

**f** True.

**g** False.

- 3 a** 3) gospel of Christ.
  - b** 1) new birth, 4) uniting with other believers.
  - c** 2) universal church.
  - d** 5) local church.
  - e** 5) local church.
  - f** 2) universal church.
- 11** Your answer. Aren't you glad the Lord trusts us to continue His ministry to the world?
- 4** If you have experienced the new birth, you are a member of the universal church. I hope you could answer *yes* to both questions.
- 12** Here is my answer: As a minister of God, I must remember that I am working in His house. I am ministering to the needs of other people. I do not work just when I want to, but when I am needed. I do not expect to be thanked for my service.
- 5** Your Bible translation may not use exactly these same terms. These are from *Today's English Version*:
- a** Family.
  - b** Building and temple.
  - c** Church of the living God.
  - d** Holy priests, the King's priests. (This means that each believer can have direct communication with God for himself and for others.)
  - e** Flock. (This compares the church to sheep who are cared for by a kind shepherd.)
- 13** The church ministers to the Lord primarily through worship. We give Him honor and glory because He is worthy of our worship.
- 6** Because it is made up of people who have responded to God's call and who have experienced the new birth. This new birth is made possible by Christ's sacrifice, and is not the work of any man, but of God.

- 14** The church edifies or builds up the members, keeps itself pure, and provides training and discipline where needed. (These concepts will be further explained in a later lesson.)
- 7** The church belongs to God because He paid the price to purchase it, and He has redeemed it through the sacrifice of His own Son.
- 15** The church's ministry to the world is mainly evangelization—spreading the good news about Jesus Christ to all people everywhere.

# Unit Two

---

## **The Church: God's Plan for the World**

