

Lesson 8

Your New Community: The Church Part One

“... God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

The New Testament gives instructions for disciples on living in community and in the world. For Christians, living in community means relating to other believers as members of the church. The church includes all born-again believers who have been placed into the body of Christ by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). The term *church* is used to refer to individual groups of believers (Galatians 1:2; Colossians 4:15), and to the universal church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23).

Jesus said to Peter, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18). In the Great Commission Jesus told the eleven to “make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). He did not mention church planting in the Great Commission. Somehow, the apostles knew that their task would be to evangelize, make disciples out of the converts, and group these converts into communities of believers called churches. Thus, the primary ministry of the apostles was making disciples and planting churches. Although Jesus initiated his church, the apostles, especially Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit, articulated what the church should be. Paul uses metaphors to describe the church and to describe the disciples who make up the church.

Read Ephesians 2:19-22. You were a foreigner and an alien to God’s kingdom.

1. As a disciple of Christ you are now (2:19) _____.

The emphasis is on community. You are now not just a citizen, but a fellow citizen with God’s people. Citizenship indicates rights and obligations. As part of the church there are certain blessings and responsibilities. As you participate in a local church, you will be ministered to, but you should also mature to the point where you are making a contribution to the overall ministry of the church. Some Christians have never learned that they have a responsibility to minister to others.

2. What other metaphor does Paul use (2:19)? _____.

He uses this more than once in his letters to refer to the church. The word *household* has often been referred to as immediate family or extended family. However, in God’s family there are no cousins; all are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Family membership suggests greater intimacy and greater responsibility than citizenship does. Family members love and care for one another. In the household babies are nurtured, children are educated and at times disciplined, mature adults assume responsibilities for the welfare of the family, and the sick and elderly are cared for. This is all done in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. The idea of membership indicates equal partnership, and

membership has rights. Joy and sorrow are shared. Family members are helped, encouraged, and depended upon. Birth, baptism, graduation, marriage, raising a family, and death sometimes all take place within the context of one local congregation. Sometimes because of relocation, a disciple has the privilege of being part of two or more local church families in his or her lifetime. Experiences, both sad and joyous, are shared. Religious holidays are shared experiences within the context of the church.

In 2:20, Paul's metaphorical language switches to that of a building.

3. The foundation refers to the founding work and the teachings of whom (2:20)? _____

_____.

The redemptive work of Christ established the church. He said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). He is the chief cornerstone (2:20). The terminology, "joined together" (2:21), shows close relationship exists between members and between Christ and the members. Disciples are building material; Peter says, living stones (1 Peter 2:4).

4. How does God live in such a temple (2:22)? _____.

Paul's favorite metaphor of the church is the "Body of Christ." Christ ministered through his physical body on earth; now his body is the church. It was common imagery in the ancient world to speak of individuals who were part of a larger group and drawn together for a common purpose, to be referred to as members, and the group to be referred to as a body. Perhaps the image was made real to Paul on the road to Damascus when he heard Jesus say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4)

We need to note several things about this image. First, it shows the church's unity and diversity. Members, although many and diverse, are interdependent as they perform Christ's work (1 Corinthians 12:12). Secondly, it depicts the universal church (Ephesians 1:20-23) and individual local bodies (1 Corinthians 2:27). Thirdly, the image of the body of Christ shows us the relationship of the church as a group of believers with Christ.

5. Christ is the (Colossians 1:18) _____.

6. Christ provided peace (1:19-20) _____.

Finally, the image of the body of Christ demonstrates relationships as they should be between individuals in the church. Christians never live individually in relationship to the Lord without regard for others. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Paul develops the concept of interrelatedness and interdependence among the members of the body. The metaphor of the human body teaches us that the body is one complete unit only as all of its functioning members are healthy and in place. In the body of Christ, each member is an integral part of the whole. Members are formed into one body by their common experience in the Spirit.

7. The body is one, but made up of (12:12-14) _____.

Each part has a unique function, and all parts need one another (12:14-24).

8. Who has “combined the members of the body” (12:24)? _____.

9. There should be no (12:25) _____.

10. Parts, or members, should have what for each other (12:25)? _____.

11. What do parts of the body share (12:26)? _____ and _____.

12. What does the Bible say you are (12:27)? _____.

The body of Christ is the most wonderful community when it is functioning properly. The body in Corinth was not functioning properly, and Paul wrote the letter to correct them. The New Testament continually instructs believers to demonstrate Christ’s love. Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another (John 13:34).

13. What is the evidence of true discipleship (John 13:35)? _____.

Paul explained how much disciples should love one another. “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10). Peter encouraged believers to “love deeply from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

14. How did Paul characterize unbelievers 2 Timothy 3:3? _____.

Paul uses the metaphor of the temple to instruct the Corinthians concerning their common experience with the Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

15. The imagery pictures the Holy Spirit living where (3:16)? _____.

Paul addresses division in the church in Corinth. They are building God’s temple in Corinth. The church is not to be destroyed by divisions, controversies, or other sins because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God will destroy anyone who does anything to damage the temple, the local church (3:17). This metaphor teaches disciples what their attitude should be toward the church, and how they should treat individual members and the body as a whole.

The church exists to edify the saints and equip them for ministry. In this regard, the church’s mission is to form Christ in each believer. Read Ephesians 4:7-13. Jesus himself gave gifts to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

16. What is their purpose in 4:12? _____.

17. Who is going to do the “works of service,” or ministry (4:12)? _____.

18. What is the ultimate goal (4:12)? _____.

Notice the three-fold effect of having the body edified: (1) Unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, (2) maturity, and (3) having Christ formed in us (4:13). Now read the description of mature disciples (14-16).

Jesus intended the church to be the agency for evangelizing the world (Matthew 28:19-20). He placed the responsibility upon the church in three progressive stages. He first commissioned the Twelve. “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14-15).

The second stage occurs when the Lord commissions the Seventy (Luke 10:1-16, KJV). The Seventy (the NIV says seventy-two) are not only sent, but they are told to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send even more laborers into the harvest (10:2). Luke emphasizes the divine nature of the commission of the Twelve and of the Seventy: “The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Luke seems to restate John’s account: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).

The Lord widened the scope of his mission to involve the entire church. It appears that Jesus gave the Great Commission more than once. It may have been repeated on three and possibly four different occasions. Whether the Lord gave the Great Commission on two, three, four, or five occasions is uncertain. However, the fact that the authors of Scripture recorded the Great Commission four times, and possibly five if we count John 20:21, demonstrates the importance and urgency of the mission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:7-8). The program for evangelizing the world is the responsibility of every church member. All should support missions and ministries of the church with their prayers and finances. Not all members will be pastors, evangelists, or missionaries. But every disciple should be involved in ministry of some kind, and every disciple should be attempting to bring family and friends to Jesus.

The account in Matthew emphasizes the making of disciples; this is discipleship. Mark’s account emphasizes going and preaching to the whole world; this is world missions. Luke’s account emphasizes the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins; this is evangelism. John’s account emphasizes the sender; this is authority. In Acts, Luke’s account emphasizes empowerment for witnessing.

The community of Christ’s disciples lives in the world among unbelievers. One of the responsibilities of all church members is to live as witnesses in the world. God expected the Old Testament saints to be holy because they represented a holy God to the nations (Exodus 19:4-6; Leviticus. 11:45). The Lord wanted his people to be free from the sins of surrounding nations, not contaminating themselves by taking wives from neighboring peoples (Ezra 9:1-10:44). The writers of the Old Testament constantly warned Israel concerning idolatry. The Old Testament protested false religion and evil culture while presenting high standards. The Ten Commandments declared

unprecedented ideals. The sacrificial system provided atonement for sin while teaching consecration to God and separation from the defilements of the world.

Like Old Testament believers, Christians represent a holy God. Not only does evangelism involve preaching a message, it includes presenting Christ-like character. The apostle Paul desired to form Christ in the lives of his disciples (Galatians 4:19).

19. The believer's holiness and righteousness is in (1 Corinthians 1:30) _____.

This has to do with the believer's position before God. However, Paul makes it clear that believers' lives should mirror their standing. "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Read Galatians 5:16-26.

20. Paul says that disciples should live by (5:16) _____.

21. They should not live to gratify the desires of the (5:16) _____. True disciples strive to exemplify Christ's holy character. Paul addresses issues such as Christian concern for one another (1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:32), attitudes (Ephesians 4:29-31) and morality (1 Corinthians 5: 1-5). He said that God wants disciples to avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6). "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Disciples of Christ live differently.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:1-5).

22. List the qualities of holy people (Colossians 3:12-15). _____

Most of the apostle Peter's first letter addresses issues of self-control and Christian conduct in relationships. He exhorts believers to holy living (1 Peter 1:13-2:12). They should conduct themselves accordingly because they live among unbelievers. "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Peter 2:12).

Jesus said that his disciples should not limit their concern to Christians. Disciples of Christ love their enemies and pray for their persecutors; otherwise they are no better than the tax collectors and pagans (Matthew 5:43-47). This kind of love reflects God's

selfless love (Matthew 6:48). This kind of love defies human logic. Human nature wants revenge against enemies. This is the way of the world, the way of Satan. Jesus wants his disciples to be different. Solomon stated the principle in the Old Testament. “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink” (Proverbs 25:21). John the Baptist preached benevolence (Luke 3:11). Jesus said, “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:42). Paul exhorted believers in Rome to help the needy and practice hospitality (Romans 12:13). Benevolence includes helping and doing good deeds.

23. Disciples should help, or do good to (Galatians 6:10) _____.

24. They should do good to (Hebrews 13:16). _____.

The mission of the church includes humanitarian work. The church relieves misery and suffering not because of legalistic duty, but because of Christian love.

25. Memory Verse:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household. (Ephesians 2:19)

26. Activity:

If you are not an active member of a Bible-believing church, begin looking for a Spirit-filled group of believers to participate in their worship and ministry. If you are already in fellowship, or are a member of a church, talk to the pastor or an elder concerning ministry opportunities. Pray about what your gifts are and ask God to direct you into ministry.

27. Rethink the Lesson

- The New Testament uses the term *church* to refer to a local group of disciples, and to refer to the universal group of believers from all ages.
- Disciples are fellow citizens of God’s kingdom.
- Disciples are family members of the household of God.
- Disciples are building blocks in the temple of God, the habitation of the Spirit of God.
- The metaphor of the temple teaches disciples that they should love one another, and treat one another with respect.
- The world will know the disciples of Christ by their love for one another.
- Evangelizing the world is the responsibility of every church member.
- Every disciple should be involved in ministry, and every disciple should be attempting to bring family and friends to Jesus.
- Disciples of Christ display Christ’s holy character by living by the Holy Spirit.
- True disciples display love not only for other disciples, but also for unbelievers.

Answers to Lesson 8:

1. Fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.
2. God's household or family.
3. The apostles and prophets
4. By his Spirit.
5. Christ is the head of the body.
6. Christ provided peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
7. Parts.
8. God.
9. Division in the body.
10. Equal concern for one another.
11. Suffering and rejoicing.
12. The body of Christ, and each one is a part of it.
13. Fellow disciples love one another.
14. Without love.
15. In you collectively with all the disciples and in you individually.
16. To prepare God's people for ministry.
17. God's people, all disciples of Christ.
18. To build up the body of Christ so all disciples reach maturity, becoming like Christ.
19. Christ.
20. The Spirit.
21. Sinful nature, or flesh.
22. Compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient, forgiving, loving, peaceful, and thankful. God's people should live in unity.
23. All people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
24. Others.