

# Progressing Together



CHUR201

# Church Life

Leader's guide



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# Syllabus for CHUR201 - Church Life

## Certificate Level

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### Course objectives

To equip believers in newly responsive areas with a better understanding of the Church and their place in it, in order to make them more effective leaders and followers for the growth of the God's kingdom.

### Course description

This course reviews the centrality of the Church Universal in God's plans for reaching and transforming the world. It not only examines the theological place and importance of the Church, both local and universal, but also covers how it is supposed to function and grow as a closely-knit organism would. Among the subjects studied are God's covenants with mankind, both old and new, interaction among the believers, church leadership, Christ's headship of the Church, the believer's personal commitment to the group and its activities, the sacraments of communion and baptism, the place of spiritual gifting, maintaining unity, and the Church's future as the bride of Christ.

### Learning Outcomes

**Content:** By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To comprehend the glory, diversity and universality of the Church.
- To recognize the church as central to God's plan of salvation, and to understand the church in the New Testament as an extension of God's people in the Old Testament.
- To describe Christ's headship of the church and how the church is his body in the world.
- To recognize the place of the local church within the universal church and to understand some essential elements of church life.
- To understand the Biblical foundation and meaning of the two Protestant sacraments.

**Character:** By the end of the course, the student will:

- Embrace the reality of God's love and care for the church and its centrality to his plans.
- Show a desire to be part of a local church, contributing humbly to its growth and unity.
- Show understanding of Christian community: keeping the bond of unity, humility, forgiveness and forbearance, giving and receiving rebuke in love, with mutual commitment and encouragement.

**Competency:** By the end of the course, the student will be able:

- To participate in the sacraments in keeping with the theology & practice of one's church.
- Recognize one's spiritual gifts and put them into practice in harmony with one's local church.
- Visualize the Church as the body of Christ, a living and active organism, whose health and growth depends on commitment to and practice of the two greatest commandments, found in Matthew 22:37-39.

### Course requirements

#### Certificate Level

- To demonstrate knowledge of course material through
  - answering questions at the end of each section.
  - completion of the final exam.
- To attend 18 of 20 instructor-led sessions (27 contact hours minimum).
- To participate in discussions by listening, contributing as appropriate, and responding when asked a specific question.
- To serve as apprentice to a pastor or other church leader for a period of three months starting sometime after the beginning of this course.
- To write an evaluation (from 800-1500 words) of the learning experience as apprentice, emphasizing the points where the experience illustrated or contradicted the teachings of this course.

### Evaluation methodology and scale

- Student performance and mastery will be assessed according to the following scale:
  - 20% on student attendance and participation in class discussions
  - 20% on completion of lessons in course manual and other assignments
  - 30% on the final exam
  - 30% on apprenticeship (20% on the evaluation by the mentor, 10% on the student's written evaluation of the learning experience)
- The evaluation scale is as follows
  - passing grade - 70-79%
  - good grade – 80-89%
  - excellent grade – 90% and above

### Course schedule

To be announced.

### **Credits earnable**

2 hours of credit towards a Certificate in Christian Studies

### **Prerequisites**

(Progressing Together BIBL201, DOCT201, and PRAC201, or equivalent)

### **Textbook and related materials**

Required - Progressing Together Manual for CHUR201

Additional readings may be required at the instructor's discretion

Recommended - any book dealing with issues related to the role and functioning of the Church, local or universal

### **Course methodology**

The student will work inductively, reading texts, answering questions concerning knowledge, application and analysis, and drawing conclusions which will be applicable to local context. After answering the questions in each lesson, students will gather to discuss answers and practical application. When possible, the course leader will give additional talks to reinforce what the students are learning through the lessons.

### **Policies**

- Cheating (copying another student's exam answers) and plagiarism (quoting another individual's material without acknowledging that person's work) will not be tolerated, because it is deemed contrary to Christian teaching and academic integrity.
- Absences in excess of 3 class hours will lead to a reduced grade; no student missing more than 6 class hours will receive credit for the course. Students who show little or no interest in completing course work will first be warned, then asked to leave the course if they do not change their conduct.

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## Lesson 1: The Church at the Centre of God's Plan - The Old Testament

In this first lesson, you will learn the special role of God's people throughout the Old Testament, its relationship with God, its communal life and the part it plays with other nations.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- Gain some insight into the development of God's relationship with his people throughout the Old Testament.
- Define the word "covenant" and explain the significance of the covenants with Abraham and the people of Israel in the story of the Old Testament.
- Give 3 illustrations of God's intimacy with his people from the Old Testament.
- Explain the importance of worship and communal life around the Tabernacle/Temple, and in the daily life of the people.
- Provide a few passages which testify to God's plan to bless the nations.
- Explain the role of God's people as a testimony to the nations, the consequences of its fall, and the need for a new covenant.

When someone says "Church", what is the first thing that comes to mind?

*Open answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*Today, the word "church" evokes numerous ideas and feelings.*

*For most people, "church" means a "building", a place where the faithful give worship to God. However, according to the Bible the word "church" means a spiritual structure: its foundation is in Jesus Christ, and its stones are the believers.*

**Read: Ephesians 5:25-27**

The word "Church" is the translation of the Greek word "ek-klesia", which means, "those who are called (by God) out of." This tells us that it is speaking of people who are called out of the world to gather together and be united by common bonds.

So, the Church is composed of all of the Lord's redeemed, and of everyone who has been born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) following Pentecost, and until the Lord's return. (Eph. 5:27)

**God's people in the Old Testament**

Today, following 2000 years of history, we see the Church has always been in the centre of God's plan. However, this has not always been clear throughout history. Those who lived at the time of Abraham, Moses or even the disciples, in the limitations of their perspective, did not entirely understand the concept of the Church in its fullest form. And yet, little by little, God laid the essential foundations for the establishment of his Church. And that which God revealed

at each time period of history was sufficient for the people of that timeframe to gain from it. (Hebrews 11:13)

The history of God's people finds its origin approximately 4000 years ago with the call of a single man, Abraham, who came from a pagan family in the country of Our-of-Chaldeans in Mesopotamia.

**|Read Nehemiah 9:7-8.** How did Abraham enter into the history of God's people? (verse 7)

*God chose him.*

**|Read Genesis 12:1.** What did God ask Abraham?

*He asked him to leave his country.*

**|What did God promise Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3?**

*He promised him:*

*I will make you a great nation. I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you.*

These promises God gave to Abraham are what we call a "covenant". A covenant is a kind of contract between two people in which the responsibilities of each party are defined. In the Bible, God is the initiator of covenants with his people. In some instances, the covenant requires a commitment on behalf of men; in others, God alone commits himself to do something. Regardless of the case, man remains a recipient (receiver) of God's grace. God really did make Abraham into a nation, and from his descendants came the twelve tribes of Israel. Their captivity in Egypt during over 400 years allowed the people to increase and become a great nation. Then God freed his people from its slavery in Egypt to begin a covenant with it.

|This idea of a people chosen and blessed by God is present throughout the Old Testament. Read the following passages and write the commitments (blessings) of God towards his people, and the commitments he expects of his people in return.

Bible references	God's commitment	Commitment of the people
Exodus 19:5-6	<i>The people will be his chosen people from among all the nations, and belong to him as a kingdom of priests and a nation set apart.</i>	<i>They must obey the Word of God and keep his covenant.</i>
Leviticus 26:11-12	<i>God will establish his dwelling among his people. He will never reject them. He will be their God.</i>	<i>No commitment is required here. (It is worth mentioning that beginning in verse 14, God lists disciplinary measures that will take place if they are disobedient until they repent.)</i>

Deut. 7:6-9	<i>The people will be holy (set apart) and will especially belong to the Lord. God loves his people.</i>	<i>Recognizing that He is God, loving Him and observing his commandments.</i>
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In Exodus 20:1-17, God gives the Ten Commandments to his people to regulate its behaviour towards the Lord, towards others in the community, and towards strangers to the covenant. In the following of the Exodus narrative all the way into Deuteronomy, we read that God developed his “law” and upheld the notion of blessing for obedience, and curse for disobedience.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and write a few blessings God promises when his people are obedient.

Bible references	Blessing
v 1	<i>Its superiority over all the nations of the earth</i>
v 3	<i>You will be blessed in the city, and you will be blessed in the fields.</i>
v 4	<i>The fruit of your womb, the crops of your land, the young of your livestock, the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flock, all these things will be blessed.</i>

Read Deuteronomy 28:15-27 and write a few of the consequent curses to the disobedience of his people.

Verse	Curse
v 16	<i>You (his people) will be cursed in the site</i>
v 25	<i>The Lord will have you defeated by your enemies</i>
v 21	<i>The Lord will plague you with wasting disease</i>

Why did God enforce such severity by demanding a people obedient to his law? (Lev. 11:44a)

*Because he is their God, a holy God. He wants his people to reflect him.*

God hoped to establish a personal relationship with his people, as can be seen by the fact that he chose it and blessed it. This personal relationship rested in part on God’s commitment to uphold his promises, and in part on the people’s obedience to God’s law.

Israel had no king between the time God made his people enter into the promise land and Samuel’s time. Why wasn’t this necessary? (1 Samuel 12:12b)

*Because God himself is their king.*

This intimate relationship of God as king towards his people is developed in Psalm 47, as is shown in the following chart. Following this model, identify two other illustrations that demonstrate God’s intimate relationship with his people in Psalm 80.

Reference	Illustration used for God	Image used for his people	What this illustration teaches us
Ps. 47:3-5, 8-10	<i>King</i>	<i>People of the king</i>	<i>God protects his people. He subjects the nations and gathers them around</i>
Ps. 80:1-3	<i>Shepherd</i>	<i>Flock</i>	<i>God leads his people, takes care of them, and saves them</i>
Ps. 80:9, 15-16	<i>Winegrower (owner of the vine)</i>	<i>The vine</i>	<i>God cherishes his people and intervenes to protect it. He plants it and labours over it with extra care.</i>

*Note for the leader*

*that the vineyard was the prized portion of the farmer's land.*

The truth of this relationship was confirmed by God's **presence** among his people. Read the following passages and fill-in the blanks with the most appropriate word.

From Moses' time all the way till the time of Solomon the third king of Israel (1 Kings 6:1-2), the physical presence of God among his people was demonstrated through the manifestation of His glory (Ex. 40:34) in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:35)— which was a movable sanctuary in the form of a tent; the Israelites took it apart and then put it back together when they moved (Numbers 9:15-17) Once the people stopped wandering in the desert to settle in the promise land, king David (2 Samuel 7:5) suggested to erect a building as a "house" for God. Finally, it is his son, King Solomon who made it built. The construction lasted 7 years (1 Kings 6:37-38).

The tabernacle, and then later the temple (stone building), was the place where the people met God in a communal fashion. In this setting, the practical living of the people's sacrificial ministry in submission to God and his law could take place. In order for communal life to develop, God established holidays, ceremonies and practices his people had to observe and pass on to the following generations.

Read the following passages and fill in the chart following the example of the model.

Bible References	Holiday/Ceremony or Practice	Purpose for the development of communal life
Leviticus 19:9-10	<i>Leave part of your harvest behind for the poor and alien to gather</i>	<i>A call for generosity, and to avoid begging. Sharing/justice towards those with the greatest need.</i>
Leviticus 23:39-43	<i>The feast of Tabernacles</i>	<i>To rejoice and celebrate the harvest all together. So that people didn't forget how God kept them in the desert after the exodus.</i>
Deuteronomy 12:10-14	<i>Bring a portion of goods as sacrifices and offerings, and worship</i>	<i>To celebrate before the Lord together. This helped unify the people in corporate worship (Every tribe and every social class is</i>

	<i>God in the single place God will choose.</i>	<i>represented in the same place). The offerings provided for the needs of the Levites (who served the Lord without having an inheritance in the land).</i>
Deuteronomy 15:1-3; 7-9	<i>Cancellation of all debts. Every seven years, or at least postponing of the debt to a later date</i>	<i>To arouse mercy towards the poor; so that one would not be reduced to pauperism; as a reminder of God's faithfulness towards everyone</i>
Deuteronomy 17:2-7	<i>Establish a judicial system to investigate, judge and punish hardened sinners (idolaters)</i>	<i>To prevent evil, remove it when necessary, and insure the reverence of God's covenant.  Note to the leader: In the New Testament, there is no notion of corporal punishment.</i>
Deuteronomy 31:10-13	<i>Regular reading of the law before all the people</i>	<i>To pass on the knowledge of the law to all the people so they can revere God and obey him.</i>

*Note to the leader:*

*To summarize you could ask, "What strikes you about these purposes?" (We find the same ones in the Church of the New Testament!)*

God's people in the Old Testament bore the name of Israel. In the promises God had given to Abraham and his descendants (and to others like Isaac, Jacob, etc), he always upheld this notion of blessing other nations and peoples. Read the following passages and fill in the chart by placing the reference in its correct location on the left.

**Genesis 22:17-18, Deuteronomy 31:12, Psalm 22:28, Isaiah 19:21-25, Isaiah 56:6-7, Daniel 7:14.**

<b>Bible References</b>	<b>Who could benefit from God's blessing?</b>
<i>Isaiah 19:21-25</i>	Egypt my people, Assyria, the work of my hands
<i>Daniel 7:14</i>	Every people, nation and men from every tongue
<i>Isaiah 56:6-7</i>	Foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord
<i>Genesis 22:17-18</i>	All the nations of the earth
<i>Psalm 22:28</i>	All the families of the nations
<i>Deuteronomy 31:12</i>	Men, women, children and the foreigner

Just like the example of Abraham, God's people are to be a testimony for all the nations. In the following chart, write down what the people of God should do, and the consequences it could have on other nations.

Bible references	What the people of Israel should do	The consequences on the nations
Genesis 22:15-18	Abraham obeyed to the voice of the Lord (by offering his son, Isaac)	All the nations are blessed by this
Deuteronomy 4:5-6	<i>Put God's laws into practice</i>	<i>They will learn that with God, peoples benefit from his wisdom and intelligence. They too will want to benefit from these</i>
Jeremiah 4:1-2	<i>Return to exclusive worship to God, get rid of all idols</i>	<i>The nations will be blessed in the Lord by this and glorify him.</i>

Through the grace of God, the testimony of the people of Israel, although imperfect, reached even to the distant nations. In the time of King Solomon, the queen of Sheba (Yemen) travelled all the way to Jerusalem to verify the testimonies she had heard. What had she heard from her country? (1 Kings 10:6)

*She had heard it said that Solomon was a wise king.*

For the most part, however, the people of Israel sought to resemble the nations surrounding it. This is why it lost its testimony and God's blessing.

**Read Ezekiel 36:16-28.** How did God describe the behaviour of the house of Israel? v17-18

*Like a woman's monthly uncleanness (women were considered impure and therefore untouchable during this period)*

With what action did he judge his people? v19

*He dispersed it among the nations, scattered in various countries.*

*Note to the leader:*

*The story tells us the Northern kingdom (Israel) was completely destroyed and that its people were scattered under Sennacherib, king of Assyria (North of Iraq) in 722 BC. Now concerning the Southern kingdom, (Judah) it fell in 603 BC and its people was scattered through 3 successive deportations under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. (See Jeremiah 52:28-30.)*

What does God promise to accomplish for his people? v24-28

*To bring them back to his country, to purify them from all its stains and idols.*

Why will he do this? v22-23

*To demonstrate his holy name has been dishonoured, violated among the nations.*

God kept his promises towards his people. In 538, following 70 years of captivity under the authority of the Chaldeans (Babylonians), Cyrus, king of the Persians, allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel to restore their worship to the Lord. This era is called **the Restoration**. Idolatry — the worship of other gods — then lost its prevalence among the people who returned to the promise land.

But the promises concerning purification from stains and a deep change of hearts through God's Holy Spirit had to wait for the coming of the Messiah, 400 years later. Jeremiah the prophet also mentioned this time of renewal in advance where God was going to establish a **new alliance**. (Jeremiah 31:31).

The section of the Bible which explains this new "system" is called '**The New Testament**.' In lesson 2, we will study the wonders God worked in favour of his people through this covenant by his grace.

## Application

### Review

Read over the objectives at the beginning of this lesson again, and make sure you understand them and are capable of expressing them.

### Prepare to share the following questions with the group:

- | Comment upon God's relationship with his people under the Old Covenant.
- | How did God reveal himself to the nations during this time?
- | Describe communal life in Israel as stipulated by the Law. Which components enrich our vision/understanding of the local church?
- | Why is disobedience so destructive for God's people?
- | Is there anything that speaks to you or surprises you in the teaching of this lesson?
- | What have you learned?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

| With the help of a concordance, find 5 passages in the Old Testament that develop the idea of the Lord as a Shepherd towards his people, and comment upon them. Then, to confirm and complete your research, consult a Bible dictionary on the subject. Be prepared to present a 4- or 5-minute account (summary) to the study group.

### Psalm 23

*As a Shepherd, the Lord provides for all the needs of his flock. He leads it in straight paths towards green pastures, watered and peaceful. He refreshes it. He protects it from danger by his presence and his dreadful weapons. He honours it and abundantly provides it with food. He makes his lambs to dwell with him forever.*

### Jer. 31:7-14

*Like a shepherd, he seeks out and gathers his flock; he leads it on easy and lavishly watered paths. He slows its pace in concern for the young and weaker ones. There will be abundance, security and joy in the numerous flocks under the vigilance of the good shepherd.*

*Take note of the intimacy of this relationship: in verse 9, the relationship of a father with his first-born son is placed in parallel with that of a shepherd and his flock (v10).*

### Jer. 50:17-20

*He repays those who do evil to his flock, and restores it by bringing it into his pastures (the weakness of the flock before powerful enemies is contrasted with the power of the shepherd; the flock will be filled by his goodness).*

*Ez. 34:11-16*

*He searches for his lost and scattered lambs, gathers them, and leads them into rich pastures for them to graze. He brings back lost lambs and heals those that are sick or wounded. He divides the lambs in order to protect the weak, and secure the portion of each lamb.*

*Ps 28:9*

*He saves, supports and feeds his flock, his heritage forever.*



## Lesson 2: The Church in the Centre of God's Plan - The New Testament

### Introduction

In this lesson, you will learn the privileged place of the Church in the New Covenant (in contrast to the People of God in the Old one), and the universal and local aspects of it.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- Understand why Jesus came as the Messiah king to:
  - Fulfil the Old Covenant and save his people
  - Create a new covenant and a new people.
- Explain the relationship between the Jews and the nations within the Church
- Demonstrate 3 or 4 advantages of the New Covenant compared to the Old
- Appreciate the glory of the Church, its intimacy with God, its diversity and universality
- Remember at least 3 illustrations of the universal Church
- Begin to understand the role of the local church, which is to reflect the glory of Christ's universal body throughout the world.

After the message of the last prophet of the Old Testament (Malachi) followed a 400-year period of silence; then began the ministry of John the Baptist, the first prophet of the New Testament era. He preached once more the coming of the Kingdom of God but with an additional dimension: the coming of the King Messiah – Jesus, son of David. This Jesus is the seed of Abraham through which all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

Jesus also announced the coming of the 'Kingdom of God'. He illustrated his teaching through parables (stories taken out of everyday life). Usually, the 'Kingdom of God' is indicative of God's reign through Jesus Christ. God practices his sovereignty over the whole universe. But He is *present and at work in a special way among his people in the person of the Messiah King, Jesus Christ*.

This Kingdom comes progressively in three stages:

- 1) through the physical presence of the Messiah King a) among his Jewish people (*the incarnation through the Old Covenant*, Matt. 12:28); and then by his resurrection and ascension on the throne after his death, b) at the right hand of the Father (Luke 23:42-43, Rom. 1:4, Eph. 4:8-9).
- 2) through the structure of his new people, the Church, by the work of the Holy Spirit, (*the reign present in the New Covenant*, Matt. 13:24-30, 38; 20:1-15; Luke 17:20-21).
- 3) and finally, in the *future reign*, when Jesus Christ comes back to judge the world and establish his glorious and eternal reign for his redeemed people. (Matt. 13:41-43; 20:21)

*Note to the leader:*

*The 2 parables and the judgment story in Matthew 25 describe the relationship/transition between the present and future reigns.*

1. One of these Kingdom parables explains the overwhelming effect of his coming to his people as Messiah King. **Read the parable of the winemakers in Matt. 21:33-46.** In the following chart, identify what the following symbols mean *following the example*:

Symbol in the parable	Person or group represented
The master of the house (v33)	<i>God the Father</i>
The vine (v33, 43)	<i>Israel/people of God (kingdom of God)</i>
The landowner (v33, 45)	<i>The religious authorities</i>
The tenants (Matt. 21:34-35) (see Matt. 23:34-35)	<i>The prophets</i>
The master's son (21:37)	<i>Jesus the Son of God</i>

|What was supposed to happen to those who reject the Son (the corner stone)? (v 41,44)


*They will perish, will be condemned.*

|To whom will the responsibility of the vine be given? (v 41,43)

*To a holy nation; this is the Church.*

|To which definition of a 'Kingdom of God' does the v 43 point back to? Select the right answer:

- ☐ God's reign in general
- ☐ The physical presence of the Messiah King among his people
- ☒ The structure of his new people, the Church
- ☐ The final order of the universe

 **Jesus was the promised Messiah (Christ).** God first sent him to save his people, Israel, who were waiting for him but also to save all the nations or 'pagans' who were not seeking him (Isaiah 49:6). And yet he was rejected by the political and religious leaders of the Jewish people, and by the majority of the people as well who demanded his crucifixion.

**So, God set them aside and established a new community beginning with the 12 apostles. Although at first this community was 100% Jewish, the number of conversions among the pagans became such that beginning in the 2nd century, the Church took on an international aspect, where the elect Jews only represented a minority.**

2. In **Ephesians 2:11-22**, the apostle Paul describes a new relationship between the people of God (Israel) and the pagans (often called 'Greeks', which means 'non-Jews'). As you read the following verses, identify in what way (and how) this relationship has changed. *An example is provided:*

Verses	The change in relationship between Jews and non-Jews
v. 11-13	<i>We have become close to God through the blood of Christ.</i>
v. 14	<i>We are no longer separated by a wall of hatred, we are united.</i>
v. 15-16	<i>We have become one people, one body/one single person.</i>
v. 17	<i>We are at peace with our neighbours.</i>
v. 18	<i>We have the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit (an identical motivation).</i>
v. 19	<i>We are no longer strangers, but joint citizens towards each other, members of the same family.</i>
v. 20-22	<i>We are united and incorporated to the holy temple, an edifice to God.</i>

*Note to the leader:*

*All the above changes serve to reconcile the 2 groups that were so divided.*

3. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Ephesians, the apostle Paul pursues his discussion on the new identity of God's people. He explains that this new relationship between Jew and non-Jews is a "mystery".

|According to verse 6, what is the explanation of this mystery?

*The pagans have become fellow inheritors of the promise.*

|Why was this mystery so surprising to the Jews? (Eph. 3:5; Rom 2:17; Rom 9:25; 1 Peter 2:10)

*This had not been fully revealed to them before; they thought they had the advantage of the Law, which was not the case of the outside nations; these foreign nations now became the beloved people of God at the same level as the Jews.*

|Why was this mystery surprising to the angels and principalities as well – v6, 10?

*They had not understood the extent of God's infinitely varied wisdom, which is able to unite Jews and pagans (different and even opposite people) into one single body.*

*Note to the leader:*

*An example of the glorious diversity of the Church in this text is that of a multi-faceted diamond, of which each people group reflects the glory of God in its own way.*



**The unity of the international and multi-cultured Church is a glorious and surprising testimony to this world and to heaven.**

4. To summarize the transition between the two covenants accurately.

|Fill in the blanks in the chart, *following the example.*

Biblical Alliances	God's instrument	Included people
Old Testament	<i>The people of Israel</i>	<i>Mainly the Jews</i>

New Testament	<i>The Church</i>	<i>The Jews and the pagans (non-Jews)</i>
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Fill in the blanks with the word which is most fitting.

i. **Ephesians 3: 5-6 and 10**

The mystery (or 'secret') of this new relationship between Jews and pagans (v 6) had not been revealed (v.5) to the men of former generations. But in Jesus Christ (v.6), it became possible through the medium of the Gospel (v 6), and it serves as the foundation for the new community of God's people, called the Church (v10).

ii. **Genesis 12:1-3**

The Church, made up of believers in Jesus Christ, is the accomplishment of the will and promise of God to bless all the families (v. 3) of the earth through the descendants of Abraham (v. 1, 3)

5. What are the new privileges of God's people under the New Covenant?

Verses	Privileges of the Old Covenant	Verses	Privileges of the New covenant
Ex. 24:8	<i>The people are the recipient of the covenant through the blood of rams and calves (24:5) (this is temporary)</i>	Heb. 9:12	<i>We are eternally recipients of the covenant through the blood of Christ</i>
Ex. 24:12	<i>The law is written on tablets of stone</i>	2 Cor. 3:3	<i>The law is written on the heart (transformation of our attitude/motivation)</i>
Lev. 26:12	<i>God is the God of the people, and the people are the people of God</i>	Gal. 3:26	<i>The relationship is even more intimate: we are sons and God is our Father</i>
Deut. 7:6	<i>God chose one single people among all the nations and all the peoples</i>	Rev. 7:9	<i>No nation or people is excluded from the covenant</i>
Gen. 17:10	<i>To ascertain one's belonging to the people, the practice of circumcision of the flesh was used.</i>	Col. 2:11	<i>Circumcision is neither of the flesh, nor manmade. It is spiritual and it is operated by Christ.</i>
Deut. 26:18; 27:26	<i>The people are blessed when they obey the law and cursed when they do not, but they are incapable of perfectly doing so.</i>	Matt. 5:17	<i>Christ has perfectly accomplished the law for us (our obligation has been met)</i>

6. The previously studied passages (Eph. chap. 2 & 3) tell us about The Universal Church. This is **the invisible community which includes all the elect who believe in God from all times and from all nations**. It is "invisible" because only God really knows who all those who belong to him really are. Christ redeemed them through his precious blood and established an intimate

relationship with them. The Bible uses all kinds of different illustrations to describe this relationship.

Discover a few of these by filling in the blanks in the chart.

Biblical passages	Image of Christ	Image of the Church
John 10:11	<i>The good shepherd</i>	<i>The sheep</i>
John 15:1-5	<i>The true vine stock</i>	<i>The vine shoots</i>
Ephesians 1:22, 23	<i>The leader/the head</i>	<i>The body</i>
Ephesians 2:20-22	<i>The corner stone</i>	<i>A holy temple</i>
1 Peter 2:4-6	<i>The corner stone, living</i>	<i>The living stones</i>

What do these illustrations teach us concerning the relationship between Christ and his Church?

*The relationship is intimate and personal. The church is dependent upon Christ*

*Note to the leader:*

*You may notice several of these illustrations have been taken and developed from the Old Testament.*

*You could ask this question: Which of these illustrations have we already encountered in the first lesson (question 7b p.11)?*

Which illustration speaks most to you out of these? Why?

*Open answer*

7. **Read Rom. 10:9-10.** According to this text, can you affirm with certainty that you are part of the Universal Church? Explain why.

*Personal relationship, according to their faith in Jesus and their public confession (like a water baptism)*

*Note to the leader:*

*Make sure the student is resting upon the confession of faith in the work of Christ for his salvation and that he recognizes Christ as his Lord. You may take advantage of this opportunity to ensure that all the students truly understand their salvation in Christ. We recommend the second course of Level 1 "Walking in the Light," a lesson which addresses this teaching.*

8. The universal Church finds its expression in the local Church. This is the visible community where believers of a same town gather together under the leadership of overseers. These churches tend to reflect communally the testimony of the universal and glorious Church of Jesus Christ. Answer the following questions by answering *true* or *false*.

Anyone actively participating in the local church is member of the universal Church.

*False*

*(If it is necessary, review the definition of universal Church (introduction to question 6). All those who participate in church life are not necessarily saved (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), even among overseers (Acts 20:28-30, 1 Jer. 2:18-19, Phil 3:2).*

|Each member of the Universal Church on earth is called to belong to a local church:

*True*

*(How can one reflect the glory of the Church as a single/lone person? How can a cell group demonstrate the love one for the other which differentiates us from the world, when people don't even see us together (Jer. 17:21-23; Heb. 10:24-25)*

|All deceased members of the Universal Church are now beside the Lord:

*True*

*(Yes, the Universal Church encompasses all true believers (the elect). For them, to leave earth is to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23, Luke 23:42-43)*

|My local church best reflects the model of the universal church:

*Probably false*

*Note to the leader:*

*Try to initiate a discussion around question d. and make sure that opinions don't become excessive; be careful not to scorn other communities!*

## Application

9. What have you learned about the importance of the Universal Church through this lesson?

*Personal answer*

10. Can you share the different aspects which make your church a reflection of the Universal Church?

*Personal answer*

11. What have you learned on the importance of the local church through this lesson?

*Personal answer*

12. Is it hard for you to recognize that the Church is composed of Jews and of non-Jews? Why?

*Personal answer*

13. What has changed in your perception of the Church?

*Personal answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*Stress the fact that we cannot hold too high an opinion concerning the importance of the Church. No matter what your vision of the Church is, it is always more beautiful and perfect than we can imagine.*



**“Christ loved the Church so much that he gave his life for her. Through this work, he desired to make the Church worthy of belonging to God after purifying her with water and the word; he wanted to present the Church to himself in all her beauty, pure and without fault, without stain or wrinkle, or any other imperfection.” Eph. 5:25b-27**

## Lesson 3: The Local Church in the New Testament

### Introduction

In this lesson you will learn how the local church was first established in Jerusalem, and how it structured its communal life.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- Describe the establishment of the church in Jerusalem; the role and authority of the first apostles.
- Describe the part the Holy Spirit played in the birth of this first Church during Pentecost, and the importance of the disciples' testimony in its expansion.
- Mention four crucial activities of communal life in the Jerusalem church.
- Explain the importance of Biblical teaching and worship.
- Understand the importance of training new leaders and the roles of elders and deacons.

In lesson 2, we saw the universal church is composed of all the elect who believe in Jesus Christ, from all nations and of all times. The book of Acts retraces the birth and development of this church through the geographical expansion of local churches. This began in Jerusalem on the day of the first Pentecost, following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

## A. The Establishment of the Church

### 1) The promise

In Acts 1:8, Jesus had revealed before his ascension how the church was supposed to start.

According to this verse,

1. What role were the disciples to take?

*Be witnesses: Live differently and speak about what they have experienced.*

2. What were they supposed to receive first?

*A power, the Holy Spirit*

3. In which places was the testimony of the disciples to be established progressively?

*In Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*

### 2) The Crucial Role of the Apostles

In Ephesians 2:20, we learn that as members of the Church, we are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Jesus had officially chosen 12 companions as his “apostles”; translated by ‘sent ones’ or ‘missionaries,’ this term designates the official messengers of Jesus Christ.



1. Following the ascension of Jesus Christ, his disciples held an official meeting. **Read Acts 1:12-26.**

|How many disciples gathered together? (v15)

*Approximately 120*

|How many apostles were there? (v13, 26)

*11 and then 12*

|What problem were the first disciples trying to solve? (v16-22)

*They wanted to appoint someone to take the place of Judas Iscariot. (They needed to establish a list of qualified and officially recognized apostles to lead the establishment of the Church.)*

|Why do you think it was so important to officially identify the apostles (considering the physical absence of Lord Jesus)?

- *I.e. to ascertain that the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ remains authentic*
- *To teach doctrine and correct errors*
- *To lay a solid foundation for the Church to come*
- *To preside and judge in the event of disputes or controversies*

|What was the necessary criterion to be qualified for the office of apostle? (v21-22)

*The individual had to have accompanied Jesus during his whole ministry and have been a witness of his resurrection.*

|How many people were deemed adequate following these criteria? (v23)

*Two*

|Could someone be qualified as an apostle today (with the same authority)? Why, or why not?

*No, because he would not have known Jesus during his ministry on earth, nor seen his resurrection.*

*Note to the leader:*

*To further study this question, refer to the course EGLI 203: The Leaders of the Church.*

|How can we make sure our faith is in conformity to the apostolic (of the twelve apostles) teaching? (2 Peter 3:1-3,15-16; 2 Tim. 3:14-16)

*It is based in the scriptures of the prophets and the teachings of Jesus which have been transmitted to us by the apostles. We need to study them carefully, and use them as the basis for teaching and reproof in the church.*

*Note to the leader:*

*The disciples themselves emphasized the importance and authority of their own words and writings to ensure the purity of the Gospel for the generations to come, and therefore emphasized the importance of studying them diligently and passing on their teaching.*

*The apostle Peter, concerning his own writings: 2 Peter 3:1-3*

*The apostle Peter, concerning those of the apostle Paul: 2 Peter 3:15-16*

*The apostle Paul\*, concerning his own words: 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:2*

*The apostle John: John 20:31; 1 John 1:3-4*

## B. The Birth of the Church in Jerusalem

Acts 2 relates the event defining the birth year of the Church. The disciples (the apostles with probably a few hundred of Jesus' disciples –see 1 Cor 15:6) were in the temple at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus Christ's sacrifice on Easter.

### Read Acts 2:1-41.

1. Who did God send? (v4)

*The Holy Spirit*

2. Who received it? (v1, 3)

*Each of the assembled believers.*

3. What promise of Jesus Christ was fulfilled through this? (review Acts 1:8)

*They received the Holy Spirit and began to witness.*

4. How did the Holy Spirit help the disciples give testimony to Christ?

- *v5-12: glorifying God in foreign tongues*
- *v14: courage and inspiration to preach*
- *v18: prophesying*
- *v37: heart conviction for those who heard the message*

5. Who heard their testimony? (v5, 11)

*Jews and proselytes (converted pagans to the Jewish religion)*

*Note for the leader*

*For more background information on the proselytes in Jesus' time, see the group leader's note in Lesson 4 Section A question 3.*

6. Where did they come from? (v9-11)

*From several nations of the Near East, North Africa and Rome. (From everywhere!)*

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\* Because Paul was not present at the time of Jesus' ministry and resurrection, some have contested his apostleship. He affirms it vigorously (2 Tim. 1:11; 1 Cor. 9:1) and received the recognition of the 12 apostles, all the while recognizing himself that he received his calling last "as to one abnormally born" (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

7. Verse 41 reports 3000 people were added to the community of believers. This is how the first local Church was born in Jerusalem.

|What conditions had to be met in order to be recognized as a member of this community? (v37-41)

*To repent and be baptized*

|At which point did new converts add themselves to the church?

*“that day” (The same day, or within a brief time period.)*

*Note for the leader*

*Application questions regarding this text are found in the section ‘For further study’ (question 1a). To manage your time well and keep the main thread of this lesson, we suggest you answer these questions at the end of the lesson with your group.*

## C. Church Life

**Read Acts 2:42-47.**

1. What activities were characteristic of the life of this first Church? (v42) In the chart below write the Church activities in column A, and for each activity provide its description in a sentence in the corresponding B column. *A few answers have been provided.*

A. Communal activity Acts 2:42	B. Description (and practical application) Acts 2:43-47
<i>The apostles’ teaching</i>	<i>Reading and teaching of the Old Testament by the apostles</i>
Fellowship	<i>Time invested together (v44); mutual encouragement; solidarity and sharing of goods (v44-45)</i>
<i>Breaking of bread</i>	<i>This could be referring to the sacrament (Holy Communion, the Lord’s Supper), or to a communal meal (‘in the houses’ with simplicity in verse 46).</i>
Prayer	<i>Praise and worship of God (v46-47); intercession</i>

2. What does this passage teach us concerning the relationship of this first community (Acts 2:41-47; see also 4:32-35; 5:12-14)

|Towards God?

*They were thirsty for the knowledge of God with a desire to please him, and were meeting regularly to praise him.*

|With one another?

*They spent a lot of time together. Through this a relationship of brotherly love was being built (sharing, hospitality, simplicity, prayer and study of the Word together).*

|With the people of Jerusalem?

*They had a good testimony, and they were held in esteem by the people. (There was also some distance and the fear of being associated with this distinct community.)*

## Application

**Let us review:**

3. Of the four aspects of the life of the first Church in Jerusalem, which ones are present in your community?

*Open answer.*

4. Which aspects could you develop to improve the life of your Church, and how?

*Open answer.*

*Note for the leader*

*To deepen the question of the Church's relationship with its entourage in Jerusalem:*

- a) Why didn't the people of Jerusalem dare to associate themselves with the new community?*
- b) What were they risking?*
- c) What should our testimony and behaviour be like towards the society around us?*

**Let us now examine a few of these activities:**

5. The teaching of the apostles

|To ensure the Church would remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the apostles left behind their written testimonies inspired by God. These writings are gathered in... (Select the right answer)

- ☒ The New Testament
- ☐ The Old Testament
- ☐ The confession of faith 'the Apostle's Creed'

*Note to the leader:*

*The Bible in its entirety is the basis of our faith. The writings of the New Testament explain those of the Old Testament and their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The Apostle's Creed is a confession of faith written in 325 by a Church council. It is a doctrinal summary based upon the Bible's writings.*

*To ensure that everyone understands the role of the apostles, you could ask the following question: Mention 3 apostle-authors, and for each one, one of their books.*

|They also trained faithful servants to support this teaching. Timothy was a disciple and companion of Paul. Read 2 Timothy. What part was he supposed to play in the church of Ephesus?

2 Tim 4:2: *Preach the word by convincing, reproving and teaching*

2 Tim 2:2: *Train up men capable of teaching others*

Many gifts/ministries of the Church are primarily concerned with teaching God's Word. Here is a list of gifts/ministries in Eph. 4. Circle those *which are essentially concerned with biblical teaching*:

1. Prophets
2. Evangelists
3. Pastors
4. Doctors/Teachers

*Note to the leader:*

*According to Rom. 12:6, he who prophesizes must do so "in proportion to his faith" just as it has been revealed in the Scriptures. The prophet applies biblical teaching to a present situation.*

*The nature of these gifts will be developed in the course EGLI 203. It is better to avoid pursuing this discussion here.*

Systematic teaching of the Bible is the foundation of any healthy church. It is the main criterion for evaluating all other activities of the Church.

Here are a few ways churches employ to ensure the biblical training of their members: teaching of the children; Biblical training program; catechism; Bible study group; the worship service/the sermon.

i. Under each of the following definitions, write its corresponding activity:

- Systematic teaching of the foundations of the Christian faith intended for new Christians.

*Catechism*

- Lessons/Bible courses teaching the biblical stories and foundations of the faith in a way adapted to children.

*Teaching of the children*

- A meeting whose purpose is to deepen one's knowledge of the Word of God.

*Bible study group*

- Preaching during the weekly service, whose purpose is to teach the Bible and edify and encourage Christians.

*The sermon*

- Systematic and progressive teaching beginning with catechism and ending in training for ministry, like the program "Progressing Together."

*Biblical training program*

ii. Which of the above-mentioned methods is your church currently using?

*Open answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*To learn more about this theme, you may study the course EGLI 205 "Teaching in the church" of the "Progressing Together" program.*

*We will study Holy Communion and the sharing of goods in more detail in lesson 6.*

### Prayer and worship

We find worship among one of God's main purposes for establishing the Church. According to 1 Peter 2:9, God redeemed us so that... we may declare the praises of him who called you.  
(Finish the sentence)

In John 4:23, Jesus said God seeks worshipers in A) spirit and in B) truth. This means (select the best answer):

For A):

- ☒ They who worship him not only with external rituals, but also with all of their inner being: will, emotions, thoughts, and animated by the Spirit of God.
- ☐ They who do not pray aloud, but who talk to God in the secrecy of their heart, their spirit.
- ☐ They who worship God spontaneously without understanding what they are saying because the Spirit is speaking through them.

For B):

- ☐ They who have never lied
- ☐ They who don't just pretend to worship him
- ☒ They who know God for who He is, and who recognize their place before him
- ☐ They who confess faith in Jesus Christ

Personal and communal prayers are part of a balanced and blessed Christian life.

Among the following references, find out what are the reasons for worshiping God, and write down each reference next to its reason: Ps. 68:33-36; Ps. 96:4; Ps. 113:1; Ps. 115:18a; Ps. 147:1; Ps. 149:3-4.

- a) He is worthy of it. Ps 96:4
- b) It does us good. Ps. 147:1
- c) He commanded us to. Ps. 113:1
- d) He strengthens and delivers us. Ps. 68:33-36
- e) We will continue to do so eternally. Ps. 115:18a
- f) It is pleasing to Him. Ps. 149:3-4

The time of communal prayer in evangelical churches is also called praise or worship, and it includes a time of singing. Along with Bible teaching and Holy Communion, it takes up an important part of the service.

## D. The Church Grows and Becomes Organized

### 1) The Church grows

As you read the following passages, fill-in the blanks with words which fit best:

Following Pentecost, the community in Jerusalem already numbered over 3000 people (review Acts 2:41). Some pilgrims would have gone home after their short visit as planned. But several others extended their visit to benefit from the apostle's teaching and to practice communal life with Jesus Christ's disciples. (In a way, it was the first Biblical institute.) The testimony of these first converts constantly attracted more (Acts 2:47). In Acts 4:4 the Church in Jerusalem already numbered 5000 men.

Acts 5:14 reports that "more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

### 2) The Church structures itself.

Living together has always created problems. The more numerous we are the more needs and potential problems there are; all this demands good planning.

**Read Acts 6:1-7.**

2. For the first time in the narrative of Acts a problem coming from within the community is mentioned.

What was the problem?

*The Hellenist widows (Jews issued from Greek culture) were neglected in the distribution of bread (whether it was unknowingly or from cultural discrimination, it caused intercultural tensions).*

How did the apostles and multitude of disciples resolve the issue?

*They had to choose seven men to carry out this distribution.*



This ministry is called diaconate, from the Greek word 'diakonos' which means "service" or "ministry". The servant receiving official recognition of this role is named "deacon" (see 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Depending on context, the Bible uses this word to refer to any servant of God (translated as such) (1 Cor. 3:5) or to a distinct role as in this passage. This word can also mean someone who practices ministry, or who has received a particular responsibility in a Church.

What was supposed to be the main role of the apostles in the Church of Jerusalem? (v 2,4)

*To teach the word and pray*

3. Originally, only the 12 apostles lead the Church in Jerusalem. In the following narrative in the Acts of the Apostles, we no longer find mention of the apostles as leaders of the Church in Jerusalem. They had trained other people to whom they had entrusted their responsibilities.

**Read Acts 11:30 and Acts 21:17-19.**

What is the name of the group that:

|Received the gift for the Church in Jerusalem?

*The elders*

|Welcomed and advised Paul when he arrived in Jerusalem?

*The elders*

James was not Jesus' disciple (who died executed by Herod in Acts 12:2), but his brother who became an eminent elder of the Church in Jerusalem and the author of the epistle which bears his name (See Galatians 1:19; 2:9; James 1:1).

4. As substitutes for the apostles, what was the main role of the elders of the Church of Jerusalem supposed to be? (Acts 6:4)

*Prayer and teaching*

5. How do you think we can explain the fact that the apostles had entrusted the leadership of the Church in Jerusalem to the elders, while the apostles were still present?

*Possible answers:*

- *The role of equipping saints for the work – training Eph. 4.*
- *The need to ensure the future — especially were persecution to come*
- *A vision to free themselves up for mission and the supervision of the Church at large*

*Note to the leader: Tell the students that here we see the Apostles' priority of training leaders in order to establish the Church's foundation (see Section A of this lesson) and a hint of their mission strategy through the Holy Spirit's guidance which we will study in the following lesson (4)*

During several years, the Church in Jerusalem served as the centre for the training of Jesus Christ's first disciples. (It could ensure the future workers in its local mission through the ministry of the elders and deacons.)

6. According to what we learned in this lesson, how did the Church of Jerusalem train up disciples of Jesus Christ?

- *Through the modelling of communal life*
- *Through biblical teaching under the supervision of the apostles.*
- *Through the act of entrusting responsibilities to the faithful people progressively (deacons, then elders)*
- *Through prayer (dependence on God) and through discipline*

## **Application**

1. What is the role of the Church and fellowship in your own discipling training?

*Open answer*

2. How can you benefit more from it?



*Open answer*

3. Following a time of prayer and reflection, what commitment(s) do you want to make or renew?

*Open answer*

In lesson 4 we will see that the time has come for the Church to invest itself in its mission to become a testimony 'to the very ends of the earth'.

### **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

#### **Application Questions**

1. In Acts 2:37-41, we saw that those who accepted the Gospel, who repented and made a profession of faith through baptism were then added to the community in Jerusalem (section B3). Think about your Christian community. How does one become a member?

*Open answer*

2. Which of these conditions seem to conform to those found in verses 37-41?

*Open answer*

3. Does your community add any other conditions? (If such is the case, you could talk to your church leaders and ask them how they justify employing these conditions.)

*Open answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*The issue is to avoid placing unnecessary obstacles before a believer who desires to join the community.*

*In the original context of Jerusalem, please note that 1) he who publicly confessed Jesus through the means of baptism would be rejected by the leaders of the Jewish community (Acts 4:18; 5:13; Jer. 9:34-35)*

*2) Several people were there on pilgrimage for the feast, and suddenly had to go home. They already had some instruction concerning the writings of the Old Testament. Should we baptize people immediately, or should we allow candidates some time to allow them to understand and prepare their testimonies, all the while providing basic training in the faith?*

## Lesson 4: The Church's Mission in the New Testament

In this lesson, you will learn how the Church in Jerusalem was used by God to initiate the execution of his promise, according to which the Church was to be established throughout all the nations.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- describe the expansion of the Church beyond Jerusalem and understand that God can use any and every situation to accomplish his work.
- understand that with the expansion of the Church and the establishment of other communities there is a need for inter-community solidarity.
- describe the importance of the local Church in the sending of specific people whose ministry is that of a mission of establishing new local Churches, and describe the strategies of these people.
- describe the necessary qualifications for being a Church leader, and the responsibilities involved in the office of this ministry.
- understand that the mission is not finished, but that each local Church has the responsibility to practice the Lord's command continually.
- Commit to encouraging those in your local church to fulfil the church's mission.

### A. The Church Spreads and Becomes Established

#### 1. The stages of expansion

In Acts 1:8 Jesus had told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in four regions. Which ones?

*1) Jerusalem      2) Judea      3) Samaria      4) to the ends of the earth*

#### 2. Expansion in Judea and Samaria

At first, the disciples tended to remain together in the Church in Jerusalem. Suddenly, many of them left Jerusalem.

**Read Acts 8:1-4.**

|Who left?

*Everyone except the apostles*

|What motivated them to leave?

*A great persecution*

|Where did they go?

*In the regions of Judea and Samaria*

|What did they do, going from place to place?

*They proclaimed the good news*

|Which regions quoted in the prophecy of Acts 1:8 were evangelized?

*Judea and Samaria*

|Who were the first witnesses to bring the message of Jesus Christ to these regions?

*The Christians of the Church in Jerusalem*



**God can use our difficulties and even our persecutions as Christians for the development of the Church. The first 'missionary' evangelists were not the apostles, but 'ordinary' believers filled with the Holy Spirit. (The apostles did not come until several had already believed. See Acts 8:14). We all have the opportunity to testify to Jesus Christ, and evangelize wherever God has sent or placed us.**

### 3. Expansion to the ends of the earth

All of the first members of Jesus Christ's Church were either of Jewish origin or non-Jews converted and circumcised to Judaism. Despite Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 and elsewhere, these believers and even the apostles could not imagine that the pagans could accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and fully benefit from his promises.

To convince them of the necessity to witness to them, God used several revelations and signs in the story of Cornelius' conversion in Acts 10 and 11:1-18 (see the section 'For further study' at the end of this lesson).

**Read Acts 11:19-26.**

*Note to the leader:*

*During the times of the New Testament, Jews were indeed seeking to convert the pagan nations to Judaism (Mat 23:15). The converts were called "proselytes" and were split in 2 categories according to the level of their commitment: 1) the "proselytes of justice": they adhered to circumcision, baptism, offered sacrifices, practiced full Judaism; 2) the "proselytes of the door" or the "God-fearing" (Acts 10:2; 13:43; 16:14; 17:4; 18:7), less advanced, were pious pagans who sought to follow the moral principles of the law, avoiding to eat flesh with its blood (Gen 9:4-6) and they faithfully attended the synagogue (translated from the "Nouveau Dictionnaire Biblique, Emmaüs, 1992, p. 1073"). Several proselytes could be found in the temple of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10).*

*The first dispersed disciples of Christ announced the Gospel almost exclusively to the Jews. Generally, the proselytes were very receptive to the message of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (see also Acts 13:43); the good news especially for them was that they could have full access to all the blessings of God's salvation and intimacy with Him without becoming a Jew, without being circumcised and without practicing all the purification rituals of Moses' law. The first Christians had a hard time understanding this in the beginning, (Peter and the brothers of Jerusalem in Acts 10-11) and later, not to impose the observance of the law to pagan believers in Christ (Acts 15:1 and following). In the New Testament, great freedom is upheld— both for pagans not to practice the law of Moses, and for the Jews to practice it if*

*they so desired (Acts 20:20-25), nonetheless, without making it add any kind of additional merit (Gal. 5:1-6).*

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> question in the section For Further Study at the end of this lesson points out the signs and revelations God operated to convince the first disciples of this unprecedented access of the nations to God's blessing and to His Church, an access become universal.*

|When the believers were being scattered to the neighbouring countries, who did they usually proclaim the Gospel to? (v19)

*To the Jews*

|Antioch in Syria was an exception. To which people group was the Gospel first proclaimed? (v20)

*To the Greeks*

|What was the effect of this? (v21)

*Many people believed and converted.*

|What did the Church in Jerusalem do to encourage this new Church? (v22)

*It sent Barnabas.*

|What did Barnabas do to encourage and strengthen the Church? (v23-26)

*He welcomed with joy. He exhorted them to remain firmly attached to the Lord. He went to fetch Saul to make him come to Antioch too. Both of them taught the Church during a year.*

|For the first time, a community was made up of many believers of pagan origin as well as Jewish. What new name will be attributed to this diverse population? (v26)

*Christian*

#### 4. The Church of Antioch becomes prominent

In turn, the church of Antioch quickly became a pillar of influence in the history of the early church and a centre for missions.

|What was the first ministry of the Church towards another community? (Acts 11:27-30)

*She sent help to Jerusalem during a time of famine.*



**This deed did more than merely respond to a real and timely material need (famine). It gave testimony to the unity and equality of both Churches (Rom. 15:27, 31) as well as their responsibility and love towards one another.**

*Note to the leader:*

- 1. An important objective (and a sign of maturity) for any church is to provide not only for its own needs, but also for those of others outside its walls. The sacrifice of its members involves their faith in God in a spirit of joy. Here, the opportunity was a crisis caused by a famine in the region of Jerusalem, requiring punctual assistance, and not continued help. It is important to avoid relationships of long-term dependence. (It is*

*preferable to collaborate with communities to help them sustain themselves.) You may come back to this discussion in the section “For Further Study” which is at the end of this lesson.*

2. *Another purpose of this gift was to witness to the equality and solidarity of the pagan churches with the church of Jewish background in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-28). In fact, Paul asked for prayer so that the Saints of Jerusalem would accept this offering humbly and with joy on behalf of the brothers of pagan descent (Rom. 15:31)*
3. *You may find additional application questions in the section ‘For Further Study’ (question 1a).*

|What role did the Church of Antioch have in Paul and Barnabas’ first missionary journey? (Acts 13:1-4; 14:26 -28)

*The Church chose them and sent them. It received them upon their return to hear their report.*

*Note to the leader:*

*Refer to question 1 in the For Further Study section at the end of this lesson.*

## 5. The founding of local churches

|During his first missionary journey, Paul proclaimed the Gospel and trained disciples in several cities; he then went back with his colleague, Barnabas, in the cities previously evangelized. **Read Acts 14:21-23.**

- i. Why did they go back? (v22)

*To encourage them, to exhort them to persevere in the faith and warn them of the tribulations to come*

- ii. What kind of structure did they establish in every city that their disciples may remain and grow in their faith? (v23)

*They appointed elders*

|Paul will still make several other missionary trips which will last several years. Those who accepted the good news were baptized and incorporated into a local church. Frequently, after evangelizing a city or region, he would continue his trip leaving a few companions behind to continue the work for a time. **Read Titus 1:5-9.**

- i. Why did Paul leave behind Titus in Crete? (v5)

*That he may straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders*

- ii. What words are used to designate these leaders? (v5, 7)

*Overseers or elders, leaders or bishops*



**In the New Testament, we find the words ‘elders’ (overseers), ‘bishops’ (overseers/leaders), and ‘pastors’ (shepherds). See 1 Peter 1:1-5. All of these words are used to refer to the same occupation.**

*Note to the leader:*

*Obviously, the use of these words in the practice of our churches today do not necessarily correspond to the way they were used in the New Testament times.*

iii. What were supposed to be the criteria/qualifications of these overseers? (Write down 2 or 3.)

*Above reproach, husband of one wife, faithful children*

iv. What were supposed to be their responsibilities? (v9) (Review Acts 6:4 as well.)

*To teach sound doctrine*

|Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14.

i. Which leaders' responsibilities are mentioned in this passage?

*To lead, exhort, maintain order, to comfort those who are discouraged*


ii. What attitude should you have towards your elders/overseers who are your leaders/guides? (see also Heb. 13:17)

*Affection, obedience and respect*

*Note to the leader:*

*Question to deepen the conversation: According to Heb. 13:7, why are we encouraged to submit to the overseers?*

 **Take a moment to examine your attitude towards your overseers, and then pray for them.**

 **Note that the word "Church" in the New Testament, when referring to a local church, is always referring to a group of believers in Jesus Christ, and not a building. In the formation of Churches, there is no mention of any building project! (See *For Further Study* section, exercise 3.)**

*Note to the leader:*

*You may stress the importance of there being a community of members rather than an association identity or its material goods. In the same way, a building must not be an objective in and of itself, but a tool among others to accomplish one's activities and mission.*

## 6. The Church's mission and its impact

**Read Romans 15:17-24.**

|Fill in the blanks with the words which best fit:

At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul, wanting to evangelize Spain, affirmed that he had already evangelized regions from Jerusalem all the way to Illyria (the Balkans). From then on, Paul figured that he had no more field of action in these regions.

|Who do you think he was counting on to continue the evangelization of these regions?

*On the churches he had established*

|Certainly, the testimony of Jesus Christ's disciples, put in action by the local churches and missionary teams through the power of the Holy Spirit, made its impact in the Roman

empire and beyond. In Acts 17:6, even the enemies of the Gospel in Thessalonica recognized this by saying, “These men have caused trouble all over the world”. (Fill in the blank.)

## B. The Church’s Mission Today

Each generation of the Church has the responsibility to evangelize the whole world for Christ.


**Read Matt. 28:18-20.**

1. What did Jesus command his disciples (to do)?

*To make disciples, going towards the nations, and baptizing and teaching them*

2. There is no limit to the extent of this command. Jesus uses the word “all” four times in these 3 verses. Fill in the blanks:

- 1) All authority has been given to Jesus Christ.
- 2) We must make disciples of all nations.
- 3) We must teach all that Jesus commanded.
- 4) Jesus will be with us in this mission all the days (everyday).

 Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ obtained victory over his enemies who were oppressing the human race. From now on, as Messiah King, He reigns over all His creation at the right hand of God the Father. He spreads His kingdom through the Church: through the proclamation of the gospel and the transformation it operates in people’s hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## C. Your Church, in your Region (Lesson Application)

1. Your testimony to your entourage

| Testimony through the proclamation of the Gospel (and of all Jesus Christ’s teaching)

- i. Overall, how would you describe your personal commitment and that of your Church (until now) concerning the Church’s great commission (Matt. 28:18-20)? Circle the appropriate answer in the first two columns.

Yourself	Your Church	Level of Missionary Commitment
1	1	Neglect or complete forgetfulness
2	2	Some efforts here and there
3	3	Quite committed
4	4	Fully committed

ii. How do you proclaim the message of the Gospel?

*Open answer*

**1. Testimony through actions Read Matt. 5:13-16.**

i. Why does Jesus compare His people to salt and a lamp?

*Salt does good, it gives flavour and the light shines*

ii. What must we do in our families and in our communities for God to be glorified?

*Shine like the light and do good*

iii. Let us not forget the importance of doing good works towards brothers and sisters in Christ. **Read John 13:35.** What impact does the love of believers have on the world?

*They will recognize that we are disciples of Jesus*

2. Usually speaking, what is the impact of the testimony of your life and/or of your Church?

*Open answer*

**2. Find out the different areas of influence of your Church's mission, according to the missionary model of the first church in Acts 1:8.**

|Determine the perimeter of your Church community's influence: which near neighbourhoods or villages can you witness to (Your "Jerusalem")?

*Open answer*

|What other nearby villages/neighbourhoods/families without Christian testimony can you reach with some effort (your "Judea")?

*Open answer*

|What other clans/tribes/peoples, even hostile ones, are located close to you or your region (your Samaria)?

*Open answer*

|What far away regions or peoples do you have a calling for, or perhaps have already established a contact with?

*Open answer*

**3. Towards maturity**

|What level of maturity has your (community/church/Church in your region) attained by the grace of God? Circle the most appropriate answer.

0. No church whatsoever (we are unaware of the existence of other Christians in the region)
1. A few Christians who live independently
2. A few Christians who visit each other every now and then
3. Occasional and informal gatherings



4. Regular gatherings to carry out the fundamental functions of the Church (Acts 2)
5. Established Church, with recognized elders and a regular ministry of service and evangelism towards the members of its community
6. Mature Church, able to meet its own needs and to assist those of others
7. Missionary Church with regular and organized ministry towards regions and peoples where the Church is not yet established

|Which level should we eventually attempt to attain, by the grace of God?

*Level 7: Missionary Church*

|With this in mind, what is the next level to be accomplished?

*Open answer—if you have not yet developed or implanted a strategy for developing and witnessing to your community, it would be a good step to take.*

|What is your next challenge?

*Open answer*

**FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. Considering the model of the Church in Antioch in Acts 11 (see Section A, question 4 above)

As we saw in Acts 11, the Church in Antioch sent a gift to the Jerusalem Church in a special time of need. Are you aware of a Christian community in financial need? As a church, how could you assist them exceptionally, and this by faith? (Section A question 4a)

*Open answer*

3. Do you know any missionaries? As a church, how can you support them in their ministry? (Section A question 4.)

*Open answer*

2. **Acts 10:1 – 11:18** relates how God convinced the apostles and brothers (who at this time were all of Jewish or Samaritan background), that ‘pagans’ had access to the same salvation and spiritual privileges as themselves. Find three revelations or signs God used to convince them of this.

- 1) *Peter’s vision*
- 2) *Cornelius’ invitation and the response all his guests had to the proclamation of the Gospel*
- 3) *They received the Holy Spirit in the same way as the apostles themselves (speaking in tongues, boldness and inspiration for expressing worship).*

### 3. Gathering locations of the first churches

Quite different from our times, when the biblical authors used the word ‘church’ to mean a local church, they never meant a building but rather a gathering of Christians. To discover where the different churches met, read the following texts and select the box which reflects the type of location they used.

Bible reference	Gathering Locations			
	Private house	Public temple	Private temple (belonging to the church)	School
Acts 2:46	(X)	X		
Acts 19:9-10				X
Rom. 16:3-5	X			
Col. 4:15	X			
Philemon 1-2	X			

## Lesson 5: The Church in the Centre of God's Plan – Illustrations

In this lesson you will learn how God reveals the glorious nature of the Church through six illustrations.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- Know and understand the meaning of these six illustrations, and the spiritual truths they communicate.
- Explain the intimate relationship Christ has with his Church
- Explain the relationship of every Christian with the Church as a whole, and thereby have a new view of your brothers and sisters
- Explain how the Church is dependent on its chief, and how established elders in the Church are to reflect his person.
- Understand the local Church is a setting for the life of all believers living in a same place and sharing a same faith.

**Read Eph. 5:25-27.**

These illustrations unveil to us the intimate relationship of Christ with his Church as its chief, and the tight relationships between all of its members. The Universal Church includes all of the Lord's redeemed, all people born again and baptized by the Holy Spirit:

- Either from Pentecost until the Lord's return (Eph. 5:27)
- Or all those living at the same time on earth (1 Cor. 1:1-3)

The local assembly is the gathering of all Christians gathered in a same location (Phil. 1:1). It is a local representation of the universal Church.

In the New Testament, the word "church" never takes on the meaning of a "church building".

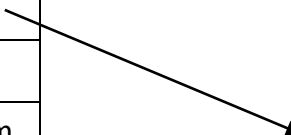
During Pentecost, the Church, all of the Church was gathered in Jerusalem. As the work spread, it could not keep on gathering "all the believers" (Acts 2:44). Local gatherings were created everywhere, as we have just observed in our study of Acts (lesson 3), but each one was a manifestation of the whole, of the one body. It was the Church of God in the location; it was inseparable from "together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours", which means the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 1:2). The church of a local area encompassed all the redeemed who lived in this local area. Such was the church of God in Corinth, in Antioch, in Jerusalem, in Ephesus, and in every other place. The local church must reflect the truth of the Universal Church.

## A. Accurately Discerning Biblical Illustrations

The Word of God uses many illustrations to represent the Church to us. It is extremely important that we don't confuse them or mix them up for fear of falling into far-fetched interpretations. Each illustration communicates one central idea to us about the Church.

In the following table there is a list of illustrations used in the New testament to represent the Church; the description of their meaning is also provided: which description do you think fits best? *Try connecting them as in the following example.*

Illustrations	Meaning
Family	Unity of a people
The Body	Affectionate unity
The Kingdom	Essential unity
A Flock	A group
Marriage	A life unit
A House	A life environment



## B. The Illustration of Family (Ephesians 2:19)

*Note to the leader:*

*To establish the context, it was quite difficult for the people living in the Lord's time to understand the new relationship Jesus instituted through his coming to earth. We see that even his immediate entourage (the disciples) did not understand what was going on. Relationship with God before the coming of the Lord Jesus was quite regulated and codified according to the covenants which had been established with Noah, Abraham and Moses because of man's sin. Now, Jesus invites men to approach God as one would approach a father: Jesus serves as mediator between us and God; He is the solution to this new relationship. Read Matt. 6:9: How does Jesus encourage us to address God in this verse?*

In the family illustration, God is portrayed as the Father and the members of His Church are depicted as his children. Consequently, Christians are frequently called "brothers" and "sisters" in the New Testament (Col. 1:1-2). The Bible insists upon the relationships that must be established between the members of the Church: these are brotherly relationships, established upon the love the Father has for His children (Gal 6:10).

1. **Read 1 John 4:20-21** and fill in the blanks:

"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."

2. When Jesus' contemporaries talked about his family, they meant his earthly (physical) family.

**Read Mark 3:33-35.** Who did Jesus consider to be his true family?

*He who does the will of God*

3. What will the people of the word notice when they observe God's family living their faith out properly? **Read John 13:34, 35.**

*That they are Jesus' disciples.*

## Application

4. So, who are your brothers and sisters?

*"They who do the will of God." In other words, those who believe in Jesus and seek to carry out His will (the Church of Christ, and more specifically, your local church).*

5. According to your experience with Church life,

|What do you find is similar to family life?

*Typical answers: support/solidarity/helping each other out, common projects, sharing of joys and burdens, listening, love, respect, obedience towards the Father, acceptance, tied through the blood of Christ, identity, common testimony!*

4. In contrast, what do you find different in Church life in comparison to a family life?

*Typical answers: We do not always live together.*

*We do not depend so much on each other in legal and financial matters.*

6. What can you do to help your Church accomplish its familial role?

*Typical answers: Seeking the unity of the members, forgiving one another, calling, inviting people over for a meal, sharing, being welcoming to all, common prayer, support through difficulties, lending things....*



**In conclusion, the Bible talks about the Church as being a family or life unit in order to underline the brotherly relationships members are expected to hold toward each other. This illustration also stresses the relationship of a Father to a child, which ties us to God.**

## C. The Illustration of the Body (1 Cor. 12:12)

As we noted in the previous lesson, the apostles were aiming to establish churches in every city. The local Church then is the place where believers can live out their faith as a community. The "body" is an illustration of "essential unity"; it functions with a **dependence** of each member on the other.

1. Write this out with your own words. (1 Cor. 12:12)

*Example of an answer: We are united and dependent upon one another and yet remain different from each other at the same time*

2. Therefore, the Bible invites us to picture the Church as a body: Christians are portrayed as members of the body, each having his own purpose. We see that complementariness and interdependence of its members are stressed here.

**Read 1 Cor. 12:14-27**, and take note of three kinds of behaviour the members of the body are supposed to entertain or reject towards the body, the Church:

- *We need to recognize our mutual dependence. v21*
- *Honour each person's role. v23*
- *Take care of one another. v26*
- *Suffer with those who are distressed.*
- *Rejoice with a member who is honoured.*

3. How much time do you think an arm could live once it had been cut off from the rest of the body?

*A few minutes at the most*

4. How much time can the arm function once cut off from the rest of the body?

*0 seconds!*

### Application

5. What do we forfeit when we lack communion with the local church?

*Examples of answers: our vitality, our performance, the benefit of our gifts and of others', a testimony to the glory of God*

6. In your personal experience as member of the body of Christ, can you share examples of complementarity and interdependence?

*Open answer*

## D. The Kingdom Illustration (1 Peter 2:9)

The illustration of the kingdom communicates to us the unity of God's people, but also the kingship of our Lord who is the head of His people.

- **Kingship:** Jesus presents himself as the King (John 18:37). As the redeemed, we are a part of this kingdom. The title "Christ" (Messiah) means the King appointed by anointing.
- **Unity:** God desires a united and consecrated people. Jesus, while on earth, prayed to God that his children would be united (John 17:21).

It is not abnormal for people to gather with others of affinity, but this is not systematically spiritual; several dangers lurk the local church. One of the most frequent ones is “discrimination”. Whether the discrimination is based upon intellectual levels, hobbies, families, races or anything else, the Bible condemns them. (James 2:8-9). The basis for discrimination is varied and the Christian must be weary of them. The illustration of the kingdom encourages us to exercise the unity of the Church.

1. Place the following verses in their appropriate box. Careful: one of the questions uses two references for its answer. 1 Cor. 3:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-5,25; Gal. 3:28a; Gal. 3:28b; Gal. 3:28c; James 2:2-4; 1 Peter 5:1-5

Title	Verses
Racial discrimination	<i>Gal. 3:28a</i>
Sexual discrimination	<i>Gal. 3:28b</i>
Social status discrimination	<i>Gal. 3:28c, James 2:2-4</i>
Age group discrimination	<i>1 Peter 5:1-5</i>
Discrimination of taking sides	<i>1 Cor. 3:3-5</i>
Discrimination of role or branch in the Church	<i>1 Cor. 12:4-5,25</i>

*Note to the leader:*

*You may point out the allusions to the lordship or kingship of God in each verse.*

2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11 and fill in the blanks.

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers.”

3. Read: 1 Cor. 1:10-13. Identify the main problem that drove the apostle Paul to write his first letter to the Corinthians.

*There were divisions: everyone was gathering behind a different leader, saying that he was the best or even the only true leader.*

4. With the support of the previous passages, explain how the illustration of the Church as a kingdom can help address such an issue?

*We must uphold Jesus as the king and accept all of his subjects.*

## E. The Illustration of the Flock (John 10:16)

For a group to function cohesively, and for each member to have his own place, it is necessary to maintain a good organization under the supervision of one sole Leader, Christ. The illustration of the flock depicts the Church for us as an organized group which remains dependent upon the shepherd. Jesus establishes himself as the good shepherd in John 10: he who guides, protects, and leads the flock. As we previously saw in lesson 3, those who are responsible for a congregation are also called shepherds.

1. After reading the following passages, take note of the similarities between Jesus' attitude and the attitude of those who must lead the flock in the church. *An example has been provided for you.*

Jesus	Action	Church elder	Action
John 10:9	<i>Feeds, protects and saves</i>	1 Tim. 4:13-16	<i>To save through the study and proclamation of the Gospel, and a good teaching.</i>
John 10:10	<i>To make plentiful</i>	Acts 20:28 1Pi 5:2	<i>Watch over the flock; protect To make them graze with care</i>
John 10:11-13	<i>Gives his life for the sheep; sacrifices himself</i>	Acts 20:28-31 1 Peter 5:2	<i>Devotedly looks after; defends against the wolves</i>
John 10:4	<i>Walks in front</i>	1 Peter 5:3	<i>Serves as a model</i>

2. Which actions in the previous chart concern you and your role in your community (whether officially or not)?

*Open answer. Examples of answers:*

- *My life must be an example for others*
- *I can watch over the needs of these brothers or sisters*
- *I can take risks to ensure their wellbeing*
- *I must be careful to know the Word of God thoroughly and to conform to its teaching; this will also help me to save others around me*
- *I can thank my Saviour Jesus, because he has done all this for me and much more!*



## F. The Marriage Illustration (Rev. 19:7)

In the Gospels, Jesus portrays himself as the husband (Matt. 9:15). Consequently, he has a wife: it is the Church (2 Cor. 11:2). She is called to remain ready to go out to meet the groom (Matt. 25:1-13). As we have seen earlier, there is a notion of affectionate unity in the symbolism of Christ's marriage with His Church. Christ loves the Church.

### 1. Read Eph. 5:21-30.

|To what extent has Christ loved the Church? (v 25-27,29)

*He gave himself up for her (gave His life)*

|What does the Church owe Him in return? (v 21, 24)

*She must be submitted to Him.*

*Note to the leader:*

*(See also 1 John 3:3)*

|What do you think should be the attitude of the bride as she waits?

*Examples of answers: devotedness; consecration to her fiancé alone; joy; preparation; submissiveness; purifying of oneself (1 John 3:3)*

## Application

### 2. How are you preparing yourself for the coming of the groom?

*Examples of answers: (To make oneself attractive) reading; meditation of the Word; forgiveness; forsaking the things of this world (goods, positions)*

*Note for the leader*

*A few key biblical texts you could refer to: Phil 3:20-21; 1 Jn 2:28-3.*

### 3. What should be your attitude?

*Examples of answers: active waiting; intense joy at the prospect of His return; the desire to please Him in all things.*

### 4. Affectionate unity must also be seen between the members of the body, particularly between husbands and wives.

|As you read the following passages, fill in the blanks.

**Eph. 5:25**

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

**Eph. 5:22**

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."

Regarding the marriage illustration, what aspect of your relationship with Christ as husband/spouse do you find most difficult to apply in your life?

*Open answer - Possible responses:*

- *keep my love focused upon Himself—not on the work He entrusts me to accomplish.*
- *believe that He truly is pleased with me.*
- *submit to Him*
- *spend time together apart*

## G. The Illustration of the House

The house represents the Church as a building established upon Jesus Christ, but also depicts a life environment or setting for all born again believers sharing a same faith.

1. Read the following verses. What do they teach us concerning the house (= the Church) as a building or life environment?

Verse	Characteristic of the Church similar to a house	Applications
1 Cor. 3:9-10	<i>House of God; a building</i>	<i>Must beware of how you build it</i>
2 Cor. 6:16	<i>Temple of God / indwelt by God</i>	<i>Must not unite to idols; uproot them</i>
Eph. 2:20-22	<i>Holy Temple; house of God</i>	<i>Must examine and test oneself in accordance with the Word of the Lord and the leading of the Holy Spirit</i>
1 Tim. 3:15	<i>House of God</i>	<i>Must behave oneself according to the truth/God's word and guide others into the truth</i>
1 Peter 2:4-6	<i>A spiritual house</i>	<i>Must fasten ourselves to Jesus Christ and obey him to offer God worship</i>

### Application

1 Cor. 3 instructs us to “construct” or “build” upon the foundation of Jesus Christ; what are you doing to build upon this foundation?

*Open answer. Example: Appreciate, recognize the beauty of the Lord's temple.*

## H. A Summary of the Illustrations of the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ on earth should already express and reflect what it will look like in heaven. This is why the Bible exhorts us to practice the love which proceeds from the Lord within the Church.

All of these illustrations show us that:

- believers form a body
- Christ always has pre-eminence.

### Beware of confusing the illustrations

God used illustrations we understand to express spiritual truths. Each one is there to reveal a Biblical principal. This is why it is important to understand them, and not confuse them. Christ is not the husband of a flock of sheep.

A house can be destroyed and ruined, and yet the Church which is a house cannot be destroyed and ruined. The Church is not made up of sheep, meaning unintelligent people who follow mindlessly! **One must not extrapolate on/push illustrations too far to make them say what we want them to.**

## Application

1. What have you newly discovered (or rediscovered at a deeper level) concerning God's relationship with His Church through this lesson?

*Open answer*

2. As we review the chart presented in the beginning of the lesson, let us add practical application to it. A column has been added for you to express what these imply for your relationship with God and towards the Church.

Illustrations	Meanings	Implications <i>Typical answers:</i>
Family —————→	A life unit	<i>Each person is important and finds his place.</i>
The body —————→	Essential unity	<i>I need to be connected to the body of Christ to live! To benefit from its complementarity.</i>
The kingdom —————→	Unity of a people	<i>We must accept the differences amongst the King's subjects.</i>
The flock —————→	A body (group)	<i>The only boss, leader and protector of the Church is Jesus Christ. I must remain close to Him and His flock, the Church.</i>
Marriage —————→	Affectionate unity	<i>What joy and intimacy I can experience with Christ, and what respect for his beloved Church!</i>
A house —————→	A life environment	<i>All find their place in relation to Jesus Christ, alongside of others.</i>

*Note to the group leader :*

*Close with prayer to thank the Lord for the spiritual reality that each image portrays.*

**FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. Note other important aspects of the relationship between the Shepherd and His flock with the help of John 10 and 1 Peter 5:1-5.

*Open answer*

2. What boundaries must a family leader enforce to maintain balance within his family?

*Open answer*

3. The Church of Jesus Christ on earth should already express and reflect what it will look like in heaven. This is why the Bible exhorts us to practice within the Church the love which proceeds from the Lord. Read the following references and describe the attitude or responsibility each of the Church's members should display. *An example has been provided.*

Gal. 6:10	<i>We must not complain of one another</i>
Col. 3:13	<i>We must bear one another</i>
1 Thess. 3:12	<i>We must love one another, as well as everyone else</i>
James 4:11	<i>We must not speak ill of anyone</i>
James 5:9	<i>We must not complain about each other</i>

## Lesson 6: Commitment in the Local Church I

In this lesson, you will learn that being a member of the body of Christ implies a certain level of commitment in the local church:

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- understand the teaching concerning the Church in Ephesians 4-5.
- describe the relationship of the Church towards Christ.
- commit oneself as an active member in the local church to relate to others according to the biblical model.
- understand the sacraments: explain how they are observed in the life of the church, and know to whom they are destined.

### A. Introduction

The epistle to the Ephesians is the letter par excellence concerning the life of the Church. In the first three chapters, the apostle Paul expositions the spiritual principles and glorious promises tied to the Church of Jesus Christ. We have mentioned these chapters several times throughout the first five lessons of this course.

Starting in the fourth chapter, Paul applies his great teaching regarding the universal Church to the daily life of the local church. He calls Christians to commit themselves to living out these celestial realities, and making them visible towards those who are around them.

Ephesians 4 will be our foundational text for the next three lessons which will talk about our commitment in the local Church

**Read Eph. 4:1-16.**

1. In lesson 5, we examined a few illustrations describing the Church. Which of these illustrations does Paul use in this passage?

*That of the body*

2. Who does Jesus represent in this illustration? (v15)

*The leader, or the head*

3. What does he do for the Church (vs. 16 and 7-11)

*He makes it grow through the gifts he gives to each one for the edification of the whole.*

4. What do the members of the Church represent? (v16)

*The members of the Church are the parts of the body.*

5. What is the purpose the Church aspires to? (v12-15)

*To arrive all together to unity in the faith (by refuting the errors of doctrine) and to the knowledge of Christ, until the entire Church perfectly resembles Christ.*

6. How does the body, as well as each of its members grow toward this purpose? (vs. 15-16)

- *By remaining attached to the Head who grants abilities to each member and coordinates the body so that each one contributes to the growth of the others.*
- *By communicating with others in a loving manner.*

7. In lesson 5, we noted that the illustration of the body reveals the qualities of **complementarity** and **interdependence** between its members according to 1 Cor. 12. The passage in Eph. 4 underlines the primacy of Jesus as “head” of the body. Why is it so important for us to remain firmly tied to Him?

- *to learn from Him, to know Him and become like Him*
- *to know how to serve the Church effectively (He is the one who appoints the gifts and roles of each member in order to place us where we may contribute to the growth of the Church.)*
- *to help me know his Word better, and not stray from the truth*
- *to benefit from the contribution of the whole body that I myself may grow*

*Note to the leader:*

*You may connect this with John 15 and the illustration of the vine.*

*Remain tied to Him = obedience to Christ as the head/leader.*



**Jesus Christ is the origin of the life and authority of the Church. Every member of His body must submit to Him. Pastors and overseers must lead the local church under Christ’s direction. They are collaborators under the authority of the Shepherd leader to whom they owe an account (Heb. 13:17). The growth of a church is insured when every member exercises his gifts along with well-structured coordination done under Christ’s authority.**

## B. Becoming a Member

A body or family may continue to function following the loss of one of its members, but there nevertheless remains a handicap. Every disconnected member will wither if he remains in this state. Even the connected members will deteriorate if they aren’t active within their church. This can be seen through the example of a leg immobilized in a cast. The muscles lose their vitality. So, the involvement of each member is essential for the well-being of the church.

The local Church expresses itself through regular gathering of its members, and through solidarity at a local level even outside of gatherings. The term “fellowship” is used to describe this association between brothers and sisters in the faith. Belonging to a local church therefore implies presence and participation. But nothing compels everyone to be present at all the programmed gatherings of his church. Sometimes, people are unfortunately unable to be present despite their desire to do so because they live in an environment hostile to their faith, or have a heavy schedule due to work or studies.

Let us now observe the expression of the solidarity that any member can practice, including those who cannot regularly attend established gatherings.

1. The Christian needs the local church. The church also needs each one of its members. Everyone wants to receive, but it is also important to give. **Read Philippians 2:4; Colossians 3:11-17, and Hebrews 10:24-25.** In the empty boxes on the right, write down the attitudes or actions upheld by these texts. Part of the answer in Colossians has been provided.

Text	Attitudes or actions
Phil. 2:4	<i>Consider the interests of others.</i>
Col. 3:11-17	<i>Burning love for one another which bears and forgives Goodness, benevolence, humility, gentleness, patience, accepting one another, mutual forgiveness, desire to learn and teach the word, songs of thanksgiving.</i>
Heb. 10:24-25	<i>Watch over one another in brotherly love, serve together in order to exhort one another.</i>

2. **Read Genesis 18:1-8; Job 2:11; Acts 12:12; 1 Timothy 5:9-10.** How did these people put into practice the attitudes and solidarity previously mentioned without necessarily attending a “gathering”?

- *Abraham and Sarah: offered hospitality to the travellers.*
- *Job’s friends: visited an isolated and afflicted person.*
- *Marie: opened up her house that the members of the church could come and pray.*
- *The widows: practiced good works, raised their kids well, exercised hospitality, washed the feet of the disciples, and helped the afflicted.*

3. Can you think of other times where you and the other members of the church could express your solidarity to other isolated or needy members?

*Open answer.*

*Note to the leader:*

*Think of visiting those who are isolated, or who have experienced a joyful event (marriage, birth) or a painful event (loss of a close person or of a job). Inviting them to one’s house, going to get an isolated or fearful person in a car or bus to accompany them to the worship service (for example), praying with the afflicted, being available to listen and bring consolation and practical help if possible.*

4. In a country hostile to the gospel, a new Christian may find it difficult to join a local church which is prudent or even suspicious of any newcomer considering its context. We easily understand this reluctance, but also understand that this could discourage the new convert.

**Read Acts 9:26-27.** Why did Paul have a hard time joining the church in Jerusalem?

*Everyone feared him, having a hard time believing that he had become a disciple.*

What eased his acceptance?

*A brother (Barnabas) had the courage to welcome him. He presented him to the apostles by telling them of Paul's wonderful conversion, and his open testimony in Damascus.*

What do you think the risks that Barnabas took were?

*Paul (Saul) could have been a fake Christian, pretending to believe in order to identify the Christians and turn them over and persecute them. Barnabas could have lost his reputation, could have been suspected, or even rejected by the Church.*

**Read Galatians 1:21-24.** What made Paul's acceptance easier in the churches of these regions?

*They heard that Paul who had persecuted the churches had become a fervent evangelist.*

### Application

5. To summarize, "becoming a member" of a local church implies: (Check the correct answer(s).)

- ☒ regularly participating in the gatherings as much as possible
- ☒ developing communal relationships (friendships, hospitality...)
- ☒ looking out for the well-being of the other members
- ☒ helping each other in difficult times
- ☒ welcoming new attendees

6. Have you taken these commitments? If not, what is stopping you from making them now?

*Open and personal answer.*

*Note to the leader:*

*You may pursue a discussion around their answers*

7. The risks Barnabas took remain today.

What risks has your church taken to incorporate a new believer?

*Open answer.*

What helped you to be accepted in your local church?

*Personal answer – For example: A member introduced me to the others. I regularly attended the church gatherings.*

What could you do to help with the arrival of a new believer in your church?

*Open answer. Some possible answers:*

- *Make sure he is put on the church info list.*



- *Invite him to church activities and interest groups.*
- *Introduce him to church members; encourage them to reach out to him.*

**8. Read Eph. 4:11-15 again.** We see in this text that God has established different ministries in the local church. In light of this, why is it so important for a Christian to strive to attend gatherings?

- *To receive teaching in the holy doctrine (through these ministries) in order not to stray, to grow and be united in the faith and knowledge of Christ.*
- *To be encouraged and inspired by others.*
- *To benefit from the opportunities of serving others through the exercising of my gifts.*

## C. The Sacraments

The sacraments hold an important place in the life of the Church. Before leaving his disciples, Jesus established two ceremonies for the edification and blessing of the Church until his return: Baptism and Holy Communion. We call them “sacraments” or “ordinances”. They are of symbolic nature, not magical. They are signs of God’s grace and represent a spiritual reality God has accomplished in the life of him who believes in Jesus Christ.

### 1) Baptism

The idea of baptism was not an invention of the New Testament. Already in the Jewish rituals, corporal purification was practiced by passing through water, and a person indicated his consecration to God in this manner. In many world religions, water has a purification role. In the New Testament, baptism demonstrates the commitment of the believer as member of the church. The term “baptism” originated from the Greek work “baptize” which means: to plunge, immerge or submerge under water. The state of baptism is foreshadowed in two occurrences in the Old Testament. (Gen. 6; Ex. 14:22).

**1. Read 1 Peter 3:20-21.** What words and what aspects of these texts enrich the description of baptism provided earlier?

*Saved through the water, purification (washing the impurities), commitment,*

**2. Read Rom. 6:3-5; Cor. 2:12-13.** In your own words, explain what both of these texts claim the baptism is pointing towards.

*Typical answers: It indicates a separation from the past in which the believer is dead and his entering into faith and life in Christ. Baptism is the symbol testifying to our death to the power of sin and our resurrection to new life with Christ.*



**Baptism is the symbol of purification from sin, of the forgiveness of sins, of joining together with the death of Christ and resurrection to a new life, of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and adoption into the family of God for he who believes in Christ.**

### 3. The Baptism of Water and the Baptism of the Spirit

The baptism of water testifies to and represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To understand the meaning of water baptism, it is important to understand the baptism of the Spirit.

John the Baptist started his ministry before Jesus. In Matthew 3:11 he clearly proclaims the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John the evangelist also tells us of this baptism in John 1:12-13; 3:3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an internal working carried out by the Holy Spirit starting at conversion. Explain how each of the following texts confirms this truth.

Verse	The baptism of the H.S. is an internal working done once and for all
John 3:5	<i>It is the Holy Spirit who makes one born again.</i>
1 Cor. 12:13	<i>The baptism of the Holy Spirit places one (immerses one) in the body of Christ.</i>
Eph. 4:5	<i>Paul declares there is only one baptism common to all believers in Christ.</i>
Eph. 4:30	<i>The Holy Spirit seals the believer in Christ on the day of his salvation</i>
1 John 3:24	<i>The believer remains in Christ through the Holy Spirit.</i>

*Note to the leader:*

*The tense of the verb in 1 Cor. 12:13 "we have all been baptized..." indicates that it is here talking about one's initial experience: therefore, the regenerated man no longer has to seek the baptism of the Spirit, nor a "new baptism" (which does not exist), but the fullness of the Spirit continually renewed.*

### 4. The fulfilment of the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1:5, before his ascension into the sky, Jesus himself repeats the promise. Complete the following sentence: "For John baptized with water, but in a few days..."

*You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."*

In Acts 2:1-4, during the celebration of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus' ascension, the first Jewish believers in Jesus were gathered in the temple of Jerusalem. How many of them were filled with the Holy Spirit?

*There were all filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Read **Acts 11:15-17**. In these verses, Peter compares the events of Pentecost with the events that took place when the pagans (non-Jews) had accepted the Gospel proclaimed for the first time in Cornelius' house (Acts 10:44). What does he conclude concerning the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

*Peter realizes that God grants baptism of the Holy Spirit to pagans who believe in Jesus (on the same level as the Jews).*

From then on, all those who believed in Jesus Christ, Jews and pagans alike, were baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.\*

*Note to the leader:*

*Indeed, the racial transition between the Old Covenant and the New one characterized by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer happened in stages. (Acts 1:8): first to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2), then to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-19) and finally to the pagans (Acts 10). Each stage represents an ethnic group or category of people culturally and geographically further removed from the Jewish people of Jerusalem. Each time the baptism of the Holy Spirit reaches a new category of believers in Christ for the first time, it is accompanied by signs in the presence of Peter and other apostles. But the gifts and signs which were used to convince the first apostles of the integration of a new people group into the Church were not systematically reproduced when every believer received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. As we see in the church of Corinth, all did not speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:29-30). It was no longer necessary to impress the event, but to believe in the promise that God gives his Spirit to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9).*

*One may raise the question: What happened to all those who believed in Jesus Christ without the presence of any visible outward manifestation (speaking in tongues, tongues of fire, etc.)? You may also bring to mind the teaching of lesson 4 and all the signs God worked to convince the apostles of the equal status of pagans in relation to the Gospel and access to the promises of God (Acts 10:11).*



**The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the act through which God saves, purifies and indwells a sinner by uniting him to the body of Jesus Christ, dead, resurrected and from now on made up of people from every nation and people. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is therefore an entrance into the universal Church.**

**Water baptism expresses outwardly and publicly that which the baptism of the Spirit has accomplished at the inner, spiritual level. (1 Peter 3:21). Since the believer dies, he is buried and resurrected with Christ (Rom. 6:3-11; Cor. 2:12). Several evangelical churches practice water baptism by totally immersing the body of the new convert. The old flesh crucified with Jesus disappears under the water. It is a new man who rises up, dead to sin and regenerated for new life through the power of the Holy Spirit in communion with all the believers in Christ. It is the great “entry door” into the life of the local church.**

## 5. Who should get baptized?

We have defined the meaning of baptism; let us now consider who should get baptized.

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\* To further study the teaching on baptism of the Holy Spirit, you may refer to course DOCT 206 Salvation, lesson 7 “The baptism of the Holy Spirit”; and course PRAT 202 New identity and new life through the Spirit, lesson 2 “The baptism of the Spirit” in the same Level 2 of the program “Progressing Together”. Concerning the practice of speaking in tongues today, you may look at lesson 4 “The fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts” of course PRAT 202 New identity and new life through the Spirit; and the article “Study on tongues” on the [www.ProgressingTogether.com](http://www.ProgressingTogether.com) website (under “Other courses and resources”)

In lesson 3, we studied the birth of the Church during Pentecost. According to Acts 2:38, 41 who was supposed to be baptized? (Check the right answer.)

- ☐ Those who repent.
- ☐ Those who receive forgiveness for their sins.
- ☐ Those who accept the message of the Gospel.
- ☒ All three work.

5. Read the verses in the following table. In the boxes on the right, note the stages that belong to authentic repentance. The first one has been provided.

Verses	The stages of repentance
Luke 18:13	Personally, recognize that we are a sinner
Romans 6:23a	<i>Recognize that we deserve God's judgment</i>
Luke 22:61-62	<i>Deeply regret this state</i>
1 John 1:9	<i>Sincerely asking for forgiveness</i>
Acts 26:20	<i>Come back to God and aspire to a new life</i>

6. Read 1 Cor. 15:1-3. What are the essential elements of the Gospel message according to the apostle Paul?

- *Christ died for our sins.*
- *He was buried.*
- *He was raised on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.*

*Note to the leader:*

*All this is "according to the Scriptures", which is our authority. It is based upon historical facts.*

6. Dozens of verses affirm that salvation is acquired in Jesus Christ through faith alone (examples: John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 1:16; 10:9-11). Some verses, such as Mark 16:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 emphasize the importance of baptism which accompanies faith (for salvation). Read both of these verses and explain for each one what enables us to affirm that baptism is not what saves?

1 Peter 3:21

*It is not the action of water that saves but the commitment (or demand) from a good conscience (through confession of faith in Christ), of which baptism is the outward expression.*

7. Mark 16:16

*At first, it might appear as though we must both believe and be baptized to be saved. But later the verse states that he who does not believe will be condemned. Therefore, it would serve one no purpose to be baptized for a salvation one does not believe in! The verse says*

*that he who believes will be saved. So, we understand that it is faith alone that saves and not baptism.*

## 7. When should one get baptized?

Mark 16:16 and many other passages in Acts (8:9-13; 10:46-47; 16:30-34) indicate that water baptism often followed repentance and confession of faith closely in the practice of the early Church. Today, several communities require basic biblical training called a catechism before administering baptism.

|What are the advantages of such a practice?

*It insures the baptism candidate will understand salvation through faith and the significance/meaning of baptism.*

*It introduces the candidate to a basic knowledge of biblical teaching, of the life of a disciple and communal life.*

*It provides time to prepare a testimony and celebration in the presence of witnesses.*

|What are the advantages of being baptized immediately after conversion?

*This seals one's confession of faith through concrete commitment and obedience to the word of Christ.*

*It correlates water baptism to the baptism of the Spirit which it represents.*

*It allows the person to enter directly and fully into the communal life, and to benefit from it.*

*It conforms to the example of the early Church.*

8. Baptism is an important opportunity to testify to and proclaim one's commitment before God and the church. Could you relate your spiritual journey and your commitment very briefly here?

*Open answer*

9. If you have not been baptized yet, what is hindering you from being baptized?

*Open answer*

## 2) Holy Communion

Holy Communion is also known as **the Last Supper** of Jesus with his disciples. It is also called "**The Lord's Supper**" or simply "**Communion**."

1. The evening before he was betrayed, Jesus was celebrating the Jewish Passover with his disciples. This meal, which commemorates and celebrates the deliverance of the people from Egypt (Read in Exodus 12:1-28.) and is made up of lamb, bitter herbs and bread without yeast.

**Read Matt. 26:26-28 and 1 Cor. 11:23-26.**

|Who established this special meal during the Passover meal (Easter meal)?

*Jesus Christ*

|What food elements are a part of Holy Communion?

*Bread and wine*

|What do these elements represent?


*The bread represents the broken body of Christ. The wine symbolizes his blood that was shed.*

*Note to the leader:*

*In the disciples' mind, it was absurd to drink blood. Indeed, the law forbade it in Lev. 7:26-27. Certainly, Jesus was provoking his disciples at that moment by comparing the wine to his blood. This was to bring them into the idea of a new covenant.*

|What is the meaning of Holy Communion? (See also 1 Cor. 10:16-17.)

*It is the commemoration of Jesus' death on the cross, and the establishment of the new covenant through his blood. By eating the bread and drinking the wine, a Christian proclaims his faith in Jesus' death. He is communing with the body and blood of Christ as well as with his brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.*

 **We observe the importance of the aspect of vertical relationship (towards God), as well as the horizontal (towards our brothers and sisters in Christ) in the significance of Holy Communion.**

2. In Matthew 28:19-20, we read that Jesus commanded to make disciples, to baptize them and teach them to observe all he had prescribed to the apostles. So, the early church Christians, eager to follow this teaching, regularly celebrated Holy Communion. When did they observe this meal?

|In the community in Jerusalem following the first Pentecost (Acts 2:42, 46)


*The Christians of Jerusalem were diligently present in the Temple daily, where they celebrated Holy Communion. They also gathered in houses. It is possible that they ate a meal to which they added Communion.*

|In Troas, in Asia (current Turkey), 25 years later (Acts 20:7)

*The disciples in Troas were gathered with Paul on the first day of the week to break the bread. It appears that this was their habitual weekly practice.*

*Note to the leader:*

*The first day of the week is Sunday. It is the day of Christ's resurrection. This is why the first Christians worshiped on this day.*

 **The New Testament provides no guidelines concerning the frequency or when to celebrate Holy Communion. Nowadays, several communities practice the celebration of Communion during the weekly worship service, but not necessarily every week. Others associate it with a communal meal and still others associate it with a foot washing ceremony (John 13:1-17.) So,**

**each community has the freedom to find its own way of highlighting the meaning of this celebration in light of its context, and in accordance with the church's means. However, it would be preferable not to let too much time go by between each Communion celebration.**

3. **Read 1 Cor. 11:17-34.** In the church of Corinth, it was their habit to eat meals together to which Communion was combined. But this practice, designed to unite Christians for a meal of fellowship, was in fact dividing them (v 19.) because some were eating their own picnic without waiting for or sharing with its most destitute members. Paul the apostle calls these Christians unworthy.

|In what way had they despised the meaning of Communion? (v 20-22, see once more 1 Cor. 10:16-17)

*They had forgotten the horizontal and vertical relationship. The wealthy ate without sharing their meal with the poor. The Lord's meal designed to be communal was made private and discriminatory, which is despising the body of Christ. Some got drunk, therefore despising the blood of Christ symbolized by the wine.*

|What do we learn from this text concerning the holiness of Communion, and the attitude a participant should necessarily have? (v 27-32)

*The previous verses show us how we shouldn't come to Communion! The bread and the wine represent the body and blood of Christ. He who does not acknowledge this makes himself unworthy of taking them. That God judges so radically by physical death demonstrates the holiness of Communion, and the seriousness with which one must approach it.*

|What recommendations does Paul give to the Corinthians to restore the value of Holy Communion in the practice of their congregation? (v 28, 33-34)

*That each one examine his own attitude towards the meal and towards the church. That they wait before participating in the meal, and, if someone cannot wait, that he eat in his own home before coming.*

|Let us recall the warning in 1 Cor. 11:27 regarding participation in the Holy Communion and complete the following sentence: "Therefore, whoever... *eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* (Complete the sentence.)

|To which of the following categories of people does this apply? Check the right answers.

- ☒ Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ.
- ☒ Those who do not understand the true meaning of the ceremony
- ☐ Those who attend another congregation.
- ☒ Those who do not respect the brothers and sisters and are not in communion with them.

|The preparation for Holy Communion. Each is exhorted to examine himself before taking the elements (1 Cor. 11:28). The minutes prior to taking Communion are an opportunity to make



sure we have dealt with all our sins towards God and towards others. **Read Matthew 5:23-24.** What process should we follow when we realize that a particular brother holds something against us?

- 1) *We must try to become reconciled with our brother*
- 2) *before presenting ourselves before God.*



**It is better not to participate in Communion until we have had the opportunity to set things straight with God and with our brother. But as a general rule, we should not deprive ourselves of this communion, because the act of receiving the elements of Communion does not testify to our own justice, but rather to our need for forgiveness through the sacrifice that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.**

4. **Read John 6:53-56.** The Roman Catholic Church leans on this passage to teach that during the ceremony of mass, Christ comes down upon the altar to become incarnate in the elements. He is therefore sacrificed anew every time. According to this teaching, the participant receives the real body and real blood of Jesus through these elements. This sacrifice participates in the salvation of the participant.

With the help of Jesus' enlightenment in John 6:60-63 and of Hebrews 10:11-14, how would you explain the real meaning of this passage and of Holy Communion to a Catholic friend?

*When the disciples asked Jesus to explain to them what it means to 'eat his flesh' and to 'drink his blood,' he said that the 'flesh counts for nothing' (v63). So, we see it is not the human act, nor the matter itself (nor the molecules of Christ's body risen up into heaven, nor bread mysteriously transformed) of a ceremony which grants life or saves. Jesus said that these words are 'Spirit and life.' We must understand the true spiritual meaning of these symbols: just as we cannot physically live without bread we must recognize that without the sacrifice of Christ who died for us we cannot live for God in spiritual manner.*

*In Heb. 10:12, 14 we have the assurance that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to appease the wrath of God and purify us from all our sins in one occasion. He who participates in Communion by taking the bread and the wine does not receive partial forgiveness through a supplementary sacrifice, but a symbol reminding him 1) that he has received full forgiveness through the glorious sacrifice of Christ and 2) that he depends on Christ at every moment to live for God.*

5. **Summary.** Respond by 'true' or 'false'.

Holy Communion is the opportunity:

- To testify of the unity of Christ's Church. true
- To evangelize. false
- To examine oneself before the Lord. true
- To obtain credit for salvation. false
- To commune with Christ, and our brothers and sisters in Him. true
- To be reminded of what Christ has done for us. true



## Application

6. What aspect of Holy Communion speaks most to you?

*Open answer*

## D. Your Personal Commitment.

1. Optional Commitment

As a disciple of Jesus Christ and a member of his Church, I commit with the help of God to,

- Become a committed member (fully) of the following community:

\_\_\_\_\_.

(Add in the name and/or place of the church or group of Christians in question)

- Ask to be baptized and prepare myself for this (with the church leaders).
- Regularly participate in Communion with the same community as much as possible.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What have you learned through this study?

*Open answer*

3. What do you need to do next to fulfil your commitment?

*Open answer*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Should we baptize children or not?

We do not find a straightforward and decisive answer to this question in the Bible. Very early in the history of the Church, the issue sparked debates and sometimes even quarrels with proponents on both sides. Already in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Tertullian, a Latin Berber theologian of the Church in North Africa protested against the practice of baptizing small children. On the other hand, during the same century, Cyprian, a Berber native from Carthage advocated baptizing children because he considered baptism necessary for salvation. According to him, salvation was granted through the Church who was the only administrator of this sacrament. The practice of baptizing small children, widespread beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, has made these churches out to be mass churches, in which all the members are not necessarily converted.

Today, some evangelical churches of reformed tradition practice infant baptism (pedobaptists). They understand baptism to be the sign of the New Covenant, just like circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant (Gen. 17). Just as Abraham believed in God for salvation and circumcised himself as a sign of his faith, he who requests baptism declares his faith in Christ for salvation; and just like Abraham circumcised his children as a testimony, the believer in

Jesus baptizes the members of his family as well. In the case of Abraham, the sign of the Covenant follows faith whereas for his son Isaac, the sign precedes it (as for Ishmael, he was already a 13-year-old boy). In the same way, according to this perspective the faith of the first-generation believers in Jesus precedes the practice of the symbol, whereas for their children faith comes after (Acts 2:37-39). Regardless, one must never come to think that children will be automatically saved as a result of their baptism.

Those who practice baptism solely upon confession of faith (Baptists and others) claim that that which precedes baptism is not circumcision but the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance and displayed one's need for forgiveness and one's commitment to change (Matt. 3:2, 8, 11; John 3:22; Acts 1:5). The necessity for commitment through faith on behalf of the baptized in Christ is often emphasized in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

The New Testament is clear concerning the need to be baptized when it is talking about the first generation to believe in Christ (like Abraham). It is not so clear concerning their children. We must note that four times in the New Testament, it is mentioned that entire families, or that every member of a household was baptized together (see Acts 16:13-15, 29-34; 18:8). But it is not clear in these texts whether they were all believers professing faith in Christ or if it also involved little children.

**Read Gen. 17; Acts 2:37-38; 8:36-38; 10:43-48; 16:13-15, 29-34; 18:8** and read the section on Baptism again.

|Write a paragraph defending the pedobaptist view (the view for infant baptism), and then...

|Write a second paragraph defending baptism of professing believers (only adults having made a confession of faith).

|Once you have done this, you may express your own personal conviction/preference.

|Who should not take part in Holy Communion?

The non-believer must not take part in Holy Communion, but there are also warnings towards Christians whose behaviour does not line up with the Christian life.

|In the following table, write in its corresponding box who must not take part in Communion. *An example has been provided for you.*

Text	Those who should not participate in Communion
Matt. 5:23-24	<i>Those who have a broken relationship.</i>
Rom. 16:17	<i>Those who cause divisions and scandals.</i>
1 Cor. 5:11	<i>Those who live in debauchery.</i>
1 Cor. 10:21	<i>Those who have a connection with demons due to occult practice.</i>
2 Thess. 3:14-15	<i>Those who are rebellious towards biblical teaching.</i>

|Does this mean that these Christians are once and for all excluded from the table? (See 1 Cor. 11:27-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; James 5:16-20.)

*(One purpose of discipline is to help a person realize/recognize their sin and discard it.) If an individual takes care of his problem by confessing it and by setting his life in order to walk in conformity with God's teaching, he must be restored and participate in church communion and in Holy Communion. Otherwise, the person must remain abstinent.*

|Read **Matt. 26:29**. For the Jews, there was nothing wrong with drinking wine. But in a society where wine is linked to drunkenness and sin, do you think it is critical for Christians to drink wine for Communion?

*No. Jesus talked about the fruit of the vine. It is therefore fine to drink grape juice or some other drink. But it is obviously better to choose some juice of red colour.*

|A believer who has not yet been baptized wants to participate in Holy Communion. What would you advise him? (Read Matt. 28:19-20 again, and then read Acts 2:38-42.)

*According to these verses, I would say one should be baptized before participating in any Communion meal because all the participants were baptized. It is a great occasion to encourage the person to seek baptism.*

*Note to the leader:*

*It is true that the believer should be baptized before taking part in Holy Communion. But there are a few exceptions each church is free to consider. For example, a believer fully committed in the church could be allowed to take part in Communion, even if the circumstances of his life or a local situation have for one reason or another delayed scheduling a baptism date.*

*You could lead a discussion regarding the frequency and the different ways of celebrating Holy Communion. For example, some communities include a foot washing ceremony in their Communion.*

## Lesson 7: Commitment in the Local Church II - Love and Truth

In this lesson, you will learn the importance of establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship with God and with the members of the Church.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- understand God’s love for you better, to grow in faith and better express your love for God and for your neighbour.
- quote several exhortations portraying relationships of fellowship.
- demonstrate resources God has given you to better love your neighbour.
- explain the importance of the diversity of spiritual gifts in a local church, and their commissioning for the good of the church.
- develop a good attitude towards gifts and offerings.
- explain the importance of setting up a structure to collect gifts and offerings, and use them wisely.
- explain why truth is important in every aspect of your life.

### A. Our Relationship with God

**Read 1 John 4:7-21.**

Complete the summary of the following text by filling in the blanks. (Try to do it from memory. You can then check your answers later by looking up the verses given after each blank.)

God is love (v8). This is how he showed his love towards us: He sent his one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (v10). We love God because he first loved us (v19). Therefore, love for God implies love for one’s children/our brothers and sisters (v21.) If anyone says “I love God” yet hates his children he is called a liar (v20). We also, we must love one another (v11).

The fact that God commands us to love is proof that this is an action that is never natural. No one finds it easy to love people with whom interaction is difficult or tense. Thankfully, in his Word God gives us the necessary spiritual resources to fulfil these commandments. In the following list (according to 1 John 4), check the resources which help us practice love:

- ☒ God transformed our heart when we became his children (new birth). (v7)
- ☒ The gift of Jesus Christ, his Son who gives life. (v8-9)
- ☒ Understanding the love, we have undeservedly received from God. (v10-11,19)
- ☐ Fear of God’s condemnation if we do not love sufficiently. (v18)

*No! Guilt and fear are never healthy motivations for serving God.*



The work of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (v13, 16)

**Read Eph. 3:14-21.**

| Paul asks God that believers may deepen certain truths (v16-19).

| What were they supposed to understand?

*The love of God*

*The fullness of God's presence in the Holy Spirit and the power it represents*

| Which of the resources mentioned in the question 2 above is involved in this?

*The Holy Spirit v16*

*Understanding love v18-19*

*(Some may also mention the gift of Christ v17 and the transformation of the new birth in the "inner being" v16; Paul's prayer in itself could also be quoted as a resource v14-16.)*

| Two resources are mentioned in verse 21 through which God glorifies himself.

| Which ones?

*The Church, Jesus Christ*

| Which of the two is visible in the world today?

*The Church*

An intimate relationship with God characterized by obedience to Jesus, our chief, and devotion to our position in his body produces a growing knowledge in the love of God. This love contained in our being overflows; it ends up seeking ways to express itself. God gives us the twofold privilege of:

- 1) expressing love in return by directing it towards our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- 2) displaying God's glory to the world by loving one another (see also John 13:35)

| In your own relationship with God:

| What helps you to grow in your love for God?

*Open answer – For example:*

- *Time alone with God in meditation of the Word, prayer, worship*
- *The social aspect in the church (hospitality, friendship, warm welcome)*

| What is the result of this love?

*Open answer – For example:*

*I think less of myself. I seek to show grace to others around me. I want to share it with others.*

| How have you expressed it to your entourage?

*Open answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*this is a good opportunity to pray as a group for God to help each one to express love practically. Begin by thanking the Lord for the resources He has provided to enable us to love.*

## B. Our Relationships with One Another

In Ephesians 4, 5 and 6, Paul gives many exhortations of fellowship, just as we see in other epistles. The expression “Love one another” occurs several times, as well as many other imperatives “one” must put in practice towards “another.” Let us now consider those commandments which talk about mutual love and explain how to put them into practice.

1. In the following table, read the verses on the left and find the corresponding exhortations to mutual action (“the one another’s”). Write each exhortation in the middle column. Then, read the description of love in 1 Cor. 13:4-7 and write a sentence or verse related to each exhortation following the example provided.

Verses	Mutual exhortation	Relation to love (in 1 Cor. 13:4-7)
Eph. 4:2	Bear one another	Love is patient. 1 Cor. 13:4, 7 <i>(When we love someone, we do not reject them because of their faults.)</i>
Eph. 4:25	<i>Do not lie to one another</i>	<i>It is not self-seeking. v5</i> <i>Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth v6-7</i>
Eph. 4:32	<i>Be kind / compassionate / forgiving toward one another</i>	<i>Is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, does not delight in evil. v5</i> <i>(Love seeks the well-being of another even if he must sacrifice himself. Eph. 5:2)</i>
Eph. 5:21	<i>Submit to one another</i>	<i>Love serves, it does not envy, it is not self-seeking. v4</i> <i>(Love respects and values others; it seeks the interests of others and does not impose itself.)</i>

In this practical section of the Ephesians epistle, we have only looked at the exhortations where we find the expression “one another.” But this is obviously the case for all exhortations: they concern our reciprocal relationships in the family of God (see 4:28-29 for example).

Among these exhortations, you have certainly noticed several address actions we are to no longer do to others. But the point is not to make for ourselves a list of things to do or not do. No, we must change our system, our way of thinking and living.

2. **Read Eph. 4:17-24.** In the following table, give the name of both systems that can guide our behaviour; note the contrast in both ways of acting and affirm the one we are to follow.

	<b>System's Name (way of life)</b>	<b>Manner of Acting</b>	<b>What should we do?</b>
v.21-22	<i>The old man / The old nature</i>	To follow one's own selfish desire which leads to destruction	<i>Take it off just like one takes off on old garment.</i>
v.24	<i>The new man / The new nature</i>	<i>We must have motivations that reflect God's nature and are centred in him: justice, holiness, truth</i>	<i>We must put it on</i>

As we have previously mentioned, when we are born again through faith in Jesus Christ we receive a new nature. We must believe this is true, forsake our former motivations, and live out who we really are: children seeking to please God. This requires a radical transformation in our 'spirit': our way of thinking, our motivations (Eph. 4:23).

3. **Read Galatians 5:13-6:2.** We find more lists of exhortations that we are to put in practice in our relationships in God's family. They are once more divided into two systems: only this time, both systems are called by a different name than those described in Ephesians 4.

Identify these systems by completing the following table.

<b>Type of exhortation</b>	<b>System name according to Ephesians 4</b>	<b>System name according to Galatians 5</b>
Negative (no longer do)	<i>The old man</i>	<i>(Depending on the translation:) The flesh / Your own nature / Man left to himself / the sinful nature</i>
Positive (put into practice)	<i>The new man</i>	<i>The Spirit (to be led by / to walk by the Spirit)</i>

In Galatians 5, Paul refers to the same systems as in Eph. 4: the old man was subject to the desires of the flesh, and the new man submits to the work of the Holy Spirit who lives in him. However, in Gal. 5 Paul emphasizes: (Check the correct answer.)

- ☒ Our need to live relying on the Spirit.
- ☐ Our ability to please God thanks to our new nature.

*Note to the leader:*

*The fact that we have received a new nature when were born again should not give us confidence in our own justice. According to the model Jesus Christ gave us when he lived on earth, we must live as new creatures dependent upon the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul calls in Gal 5 "to be led by the Spirit".*

Notice that the expression of mutuality is repeated 6 times in Galatians 5:13-6:2.\*

In the following list, check the verses addressed to Christians led by the Holy Spirit.

- ☒ to be servants of one another 5:13
- ☐ to bite and devour one another 5:15
- ☐ be destroyed by one another 5:15
- ☐ to provoke one another 5:26
- ☐ to envy one another 5:26
- ☒ to bear one another's burdens 6:2

What do you think a church would look like where most of the members are fleshly, as opposed a church where most are spiritual? Distinguish both cases in this table:

A church led by a fleshly spirit	A church where the fruit of the spirit is visible
<i>I.e.</i> <i>Many quarrels, factions, rivalries and jealousies.</i> <i>Problems of sexual misconduct</i> <i>Pride which make correction and growth in the Word difficult</i> <i>Many people wanting to be leaders</i>	<i>I.e.</i> <i>Welcome and patience toward one another</i> <i>A heart of service without seeking to be honoured or recognized</i> <i>A spirit of simplicity and joy</i> <i>Spontaneous sharing and a spirit of liberalism</i>

4. Read Rom. 12:9-18; Heb. 13:1-3; 1 Peter 3:8-9. Find at least 5 actions that are the fruit of love one for another. Be prepared to defend your choices before the group. Circle one or two of them that you want to act out in your own life.

Among the answers possible from the texts:

Romans 12:9-18

- Seek what is good: v 9 and 17
- Display affection and be devoted to each other: v 10
- Honour others with mutual considerations—consider others as more important in the way we treat them: v 10 and 16
- Serve others willingly as if for the Lord: v 11
- Be patient: v 12
- Pray faithfully for others: v 12
- Provide for the needs of others: v 13
- Practice hospitality: v 13

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\* To deepen your study of the new nature, and of how to live in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, you may refer to the course: New Identity and New Life through the Spirit PRAT 202 of the program "Progressing Together".



- *Rejoice with those who rejoice: v 15*
- *Mourn with those who mourn: v 15*
- *Be at peace with others: v 16-18*

*Hebrews 13:1-3*

- *Love each other: v 1*
- *Offer hospitality: v 2*
- *Think of those who are suffering (mistreated, imprisoned): v 3*

*1 Peter 3:8-9*

- *Share the same feelings: v 8*
- *Love one another: v 8*
- *Be compassionate: v 8*
- *Be humble: v 8*
- *Do not seek vengeance—forgive: v 9*
- *Bless those who treat you badly: v 9*

5. The local church is called to function as a family. However, our bodily families do not always reflect family values as God intended them to. Sometimes we need to change certain behaviours that we may love one another in our bodily family as well as in our spiritual family.

|Read the following list of some behaviours. Check those which hinder fellowship:

- ☒ Judging others
- ☒ Thinking of oneself first (selfishness)
- ☒ Entertaining feelings of anger toward others
- ☐ Being generous toward others
- ☒ Being jealous of others
- ☐ Sharing with others
- ☒ Being bitter toward others
- ☐ Forgiving others
- ☒ Maintaining unhealed wounds
- ☒ Fear of being rejected and rejecting others
- ☐ Going toward others
- ☐ Participating in groups
- ☒ Maintaining feelings of inferiority
- ☐ Praying for others
- ☒ Maintaining a false notion of God as father
- ☐ Examining what the Bible says concerning brotherly love

8. Do you recognize yourself in some of these aspects? How can you correct what is not right?

*Open answer – For example: confession, repentance, prayer, reconciliation*

*Note to the leader:*

*Encourage all to take responsibility to deal with their own problem behaviours. Be ready to accompany those who may want help to address a particular behaviour.*

In the preceding list, what positive behaviours would you like to carry out in the church?

*Open answer*

6. **Summary:** What lessons can we learn from the use of the expression “one another” in the New Testament? Here is a list of seven principles suggested by A. Kuen\*. (Be careful, one of them has been distorted.)

Cross out the erroneous sentence in (section a), and then rewrite it correctly in the space underneath (section b).

#### Section a

1. Normal Christian life is lived out in a specific setting, a community.
2. The expression “one another” implies a specific setting, a community (the church).
3. The exhortations following the expression “one another” imply concrete and continuous relationships with a specific social group.
4. ~~All these exhortations are only written for church leaders.~~
5. These relationships are very different. (Thirty out of fifty are different.)
6. The commandments are either positive or negative.
7. All these various commandments are simply variations of the most frequent one: “Love one another”.

*Note to leader*

*(This is not a list of magic formulas we are to put in practice, but various and personalized expressions of love.)*

#### Section b

*Replace with something like: All these exhortations are written to the whole body of Christians. (Therefore, all are made responsible to insure these expressions of love in the congregation.)*

## C. Our Spiritual Gifts

Another way of expressing our love toward the body of Christ is to practice our spiritual gifts. **A spiritual gift is a particular ability granted by God to each believer, with the purpose of serving one another in the setting of the Body of Christ.**

**Read 1 Peter 4:10-11.**

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\* Alfred Kuen “Les uns les autres” Ed. Emmaüs, Saint-Légier, Suisse, 1995.

Some elements of the following definition are found again in verse 10: “Since each one has received a gift, put it at the service of others as good stewards of the grace so diverse of God.” (NIV)

In the following table, select (by putting a check in the middle column) the parts of the definition that are found in verse 10, and write the part of the verse that corresponds. A model has been provided.

Part of the Definition		Corresponding verse in 1 Peter 4:10
A particular ability	✓	<i>Grace in its various forms</i>
Granted by God	✓	<i>Steward of the grace... of God</i>
Each one	✓	<i>Each one... has received</i>
In view of serving others in the setting of the body of Christ	✓	<i>Each... to serve others (the members of the Church)</i>

In verse 10, we are encouraged to act as “good stewards” with the gift we have received. The Greek word “*oikonomos*” is often used in the New Testament to illustrate our role as servants of God. (Luke 12:42-48; 16:1-8). Translated by “steward”, “administrator”, or “manager”, an *oikonomos* was the main servant of a prominent house. He was to manage considerable property and give an account to his master. He supervised a team of servants and made sure their needs were met. When his master was absent, he was the one who took charge of everything. (Luke 12:42-43).

In what way are we similar to stewards, “serving leaders”?

*Here are a few answers:*

- *All we have belongs to God.*
- *We have received many things from God, our spiritual and material gifts are substantial.*
- *He wants us to invest in order to grow his kingdom.*
- *He gives to each one the freedom and responsibility to manage himself with his help, and to give him directly an account.*

How can we be a good steward in this context? (See also Luke 12:42-43.)

*To place our gift at the service of others with faithfulness and caution, according to our master's desire.*

What gifts are mentioned in 1 Peter 4:11?

*The gift of speech and service.*

The apostle Paul lists other gifts in his letters (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 28; Eph. 4:11): i.e. mercy, discernment, tongues and their interpretation, help, governing, etc.)

**Read: Eph. 4:11-16.**

|Then, read the following biblical commentaries and write in the blank before them the verse to which each corresponds. (Careful, the same verse may have several commentaries!)

V 11 When God established the Church, the first gift he gave was that of Apostle.

*Note to the leader:*

*The role of “the 12” was to teach the Gospel of Christ and to establish his Church. They wrote the New Testament which still remains (with the Old) the only authority of the Church.*

V 11 \_\_\_\_\_ Then he gave servants through different ministries of the Word.

*Note to the leader:*

*Its role was to give apostolic teaching to the Church. Each church needs people who have the gift of explaining and showing how to apply the Bible.*

V 12 \_\_\_\_\_ The purpose of his servants’ ministry is to empower all the members of the churches and enable them to emphasize the gift(s) God gave them.

V 13 (and 15) When all the members place their gifts at the service of the Church of Christ, it comes to unity, maturity and perfection in Christ.

V 14 \_\_\_\_\_ Each Christian runs the risk of straying from the truth. There are false doctors and dangerous teachings.

V 15-16 \_\_\_\_\_ Christ gives the necessary inspiration, guidance and strength for us to contribute our gifts to the service of the Church.

V 16 \_\_\_\_\_ So, we must:

- 1) remain obedient and intimately tied to Christ and
- 2) remain in our place in his body, the Church. It is often through the other members (the joints) that we receive our spiritual food given by our leader, Christ.

In verse 12 we read:

“It was he who gave some to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (NIV)

|What illustration represents the Church in this verse?

*The body*

|What does this illustration teach us concerning spiritual gifts? (Review Lesson 5 section C and Eph. 4:11-16)

*We need all these gifts to grow together toward the perfect measure and stature of Christ. Since no one has every gift, we need to practice our own individual gifts toward one another (Interdependence and complementarity). Each gift is important!*

*Note to the leader:*

*We must therefore understand that “unity” does not mean “uniformity”. If everyone had the same function and the same gift, you can just imagine the stagnation and boredom in the church!*

|What is God's purpose when he gives different gifts to each member of the body?

*The edification of the church—growth/maturity/well-being of the body of Christians in love (v16); until the perfect stature of Christ (v13) and stability (v14).*



**So, it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. 1 Cor. 14:12**

## Application

|What does 'being a member of the body of Christ' mean to you?

*Open answer*

*For example: It is a wonderful privilege to be able to share (receive and offer) gifts and talents in the context of a great community. It is beautiful to see the diversity of Christ's body and realize that I too am unique and yet fully a part of the whole. Whatever happens to the other members of the body concerns me as well, whether good or bad. I do not seek my own spiritual progress alone, but also that of the entirety of Christ's Church.*

|Describe your role (your service in the church).\*

*Open answer*

|How does this ministry edify the whole body of the Church?

*Open answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*You could add an encouragement such as this: "Your gift, or your combination of gifts is unique. You are the only one capable of offering it to the Church. No one else will be able to give it in your place. At the same time, no one is indispensable, and God is capable of raising other workers to carry out the various tasks ('jobs') in his church"*

|How have you been edified by other believers?

*Open answer*

|Do all the members play an active role in your church, or do you sense that it is the leaders (or leader) who takes care of everything?

*Open answer*

|If the master came back today, would he find you a faithful steward, exercising your gifts for the edification of the Church? Otherwise, what do you need to change?

*Open answer*

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\* To discover your own particular gifts, you may refer to the course PRAT 202 New Identity: New life in the Spirit, lesson 4 "The fruit of the Spirit and spiritual gifts" of the Program "Progressing Together."

*Note to the leader:*

*The study of the stewardship of spiritual gifts will be further studied in the course EGLI 201 The ministries in the Church of the Program “Progressing Together”.*

## D. Commitment Through our Offerings

Let us now study another way of expressing the love and commitment that contributes to fellowship and edification of the local church.

1. **Read Acts 2:45; Rom. 15:25-27; 2 Cor. 8:1-4.** Describe this other expression of fellowship in the early church.

*Mutual material aid. Christians brought their possessions or money (at least part of it) to share with those who were in need.*

2. It is normal that through mutual love Christians would help each other out. What other reasons do you think exist for bringing our offerings to the church. (See the examples in Matt. 10:7-10; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; Gal. 6:6.)

*To finance evangelism.*

*To assist financially the pastor of the church (at least in part, especially if he doesn't have a paid job) and missionaries abroad (see lesson 4).*

3. In the Old Testament, the law established an offering of one tenth of one's income (tithe) which was given to the Levites, teachers of the law and ministers in the Temple (the Levites did not receive any other salary). **Read 1 Cor. 16:1-4.**

The apostle Paul prepares the church of Corinth to participate in a special inter-church collection for the brothers and sisters of Judea who were in need because of a famine. He provides several principles regarding Christian offering and the management of gathered funds. Respond by 'true' or 'false' following each principle here below. Be prepared to defend your answer from the text.

False Paul commands the Christians of Corinth to give a specific percentage of their income.

*Note to the leader:*

*In the New Testament, there is nowhere mention of a specific percentage. The key words are freedom/generosity and joy. 'in keeping with his income' v2. The tithe (A tenth) may serve as a point of reference, but God gives us great freedom.*

False The poor and destitute are exempt from participating in the offering.

*“Each one of you...”*

True It is important to give regularly and intentionally.

*“On the first day of every week...”*

True Our offering to the Lord should be a priority in our budget (the planning of our expenses and savings).

*"On the first day of every week...", not what is left at the end!*

False We should trust one servant to manage the offerings.

*The community chose trustworthy men to accompany the offering and check everything.*

True It is important for the church to make sure its funds arrive to their destination with transparency. *Even to the point of paying the trip for several representatives/overseers!*

#### 4. Read 2 Cor. 9:7-11.

|What should be the heart attitude of he who gives to the Lord? v7

*"What he has decided in his heart" with joy (and without regret or constraint)*

#### What does God promise to he who gives generously? v8-11

*He will satisfy all his needs. In other words, he will not lack anything because he has given. Besides, he will be richer, not necessarily financially, but in blessings.*

*Notes to the leader:*

*This is no guarantee against hard times; it is not a magic formula. Paul himself knew scarcity as well as abundance. Phil. 4:3!*

*Jesus said: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Jesus was warning his disciples against the love of money knowing that it is a trap (1 Tim. 6:10). The Christian who has understood that Jesus is his treasure gives him all of his heart. He believes money to be necessary for life, but not a treasure. The act of giving to his community with liberty is an indicator of his love for Christ.*

### Application

5. Following your answer to the previous question, would you say you have experienced particular blessing after sacrificing to give an offering? Describe this.

*Open answer*

## E. Truth

Truth goes hand in hand with love in our mutual relationships in the Church. It is fully a part of love (1 Cor. 13:5). Love without truth is mere sentimentalism. If I love someone who is in danger, I will warn him, even if he won't like what I am going to tell him. (James 5:19-20).

#### 1. Read Ephesians 4:20-25 again.

|Verse 25 tells us: (fill in the blanks)

"Put off falsehood, and speak truthfully to his neighbour."

9. In verses 24 and 25, two reasons are given to encourage us not to lie. Which ones? Clarify in your own words.

- 1) v 24: *We are created with a new nature which reflects the justice and truth of God. Therefore, it is going against nature to lie.*
- 2) v 25: *We are members of a same body—we also hurt ourselves by doing this!*

2. Throughout the exhortations of things to practice in our mutual relationships in the Body of Christ in Eph. 4:25 to 5:21, we find several concerned primarily with truth or honesty. Each one talks about a different area of life:

our body/conduct                      our belongings                      our language                      our teaching

Read each passage of the following table, find the area it talks about, and list the practices we should forsake in our everyday life. *The first aspect in question has been provided as an example.*

Verses	Concerned area	Practices we must forego
4:25, 29; 5:4	<i>Our language</i>	<i>Lying 4:25 To speak in a hurtful or unhealthy manner 4:29 Coarse joking 5:4</i>
4:28	<i>Our belongings</i>	<i>To steal: rather we should honestly work that we may help others</i>
5:3-5,15	<i>Our body / our conduct</i>	<i>Practicing sexual immorality or debauched practices 5:3, 5 Seeking to gather material goods 5:3, 5</i>
5:6-7	<i>Our teaching</i> *	<i>Avoid empty words that seek to seduce and make a profit from the listeners:</i>

**“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”**

**Ephesians 5:8**

*Notes to the leader*

*v 8 is a key verse of this passage. You may explore its meaning by asking a few questions: For each practice spelled in the table, identify the lie and the valuable thing that has been cheated as a result.*

*Can you give examples of hidden, shameful or foolish practices around you?*

*\* (Teaching) You may also refer to 1 Tim. 1:5 to come back to the real purpose of this teaching: love from a pure and sincere heart, and a faith without hypocrisy.*

## Application

3. In what circumstances do you think it might be better to lie to a brother?

*Never! (We do not have to reveal the whole truth to each brother or sister—often it is better not to! But it is absolutely crucial that everything we tell one another is true.)*



*Note to the leader:*

- *Here are a few potential thoughts for reflection:*
- *Why are we afraid of telling the truth to our brother/sister?*
- *What do we gain by telling a lie?*
- *Can I lie to do good?*
- *What are the effects of lies:*
  - *on our relationships?*
  - *long term?*
- *The warning of Ananias' example Acts 5:1-10*

4. Is there a habit of lying you haven't given up yet?

*Personal answer*

*Note to the leader:*

*This is a pastoral opportunity you may develop depending on the level of group intimacy and the remaining time available.*

## F. Truth with Love

Concluding our text concerning the edification of the body of Christ in Ephesians 4 verse 15, Paul gives the best key to Church growth.

1. What is this key?

*To speak the truth with love*

2. Explain this key with your own words, or provide an example of its application. (Have you personally benefited from an experience you could share?)

*I should not hide the truth or avoid a brother/sister's problem; when I need to confront him/her, I should do it kindly, encouraging him/her to move forward and not accuse or belittle him/her. I can also take note of the positive things in others and encourage them.*

3. Truth with love? Truth without love? In the following sentences, identify every time you see one or the other. Cross out 'with love' or 'without love' as you deem appropriate.

- "You are late again!! It disturbs the whole congregation. You aren't worthy of being a part of the worship team or of doing any kind of service for the Lord."  
→ "Truth" ~~with love~~/without love.
- "Latifa, you know that Amar is not converted yet. It is not a good idea to see him. It would be better to take a break in your relationship with him and let the Lord work in his heart first."  
→ "Truth" with love/~~without love~~.
- "You talked to the strangers at Jamal's conversion. You obviously lack wisdom. You are putting everyone in danger because of your carelessness."

→ “Truth” ~~with love~~/without love.

*Note to the leader:*

*In the previous examples, you may make note of the fact that everything is not necessarily true, but that these are personal subjective observations.)*

In the next lesson, we will learn to speak the truth with love, and how crucial this is to maintaining the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ.

### **FOR FURTHER STUDY**

For further reflection on the biblical mandate concerning our mutual relationships among Christians and its practical outworking, you may study the book of *Alfred Kuen “Les uns les autres”* Ed. Emmaüs, Saint-Légier, Suisse, 1995

## Lesson 8: Commitment in the Church III: Unity in Everyday Life

In this lesson, you will learn that being a member of the body of Christ involves a commitment to maintain unity and peace in the local Church.

At the end of this study, you will be able to:

- describe what God has done to unite us all through the Body of Christ
- understand the importance of bearing one another in the Church
- understand the roots of potential conflicts, and discern the eventual presence of sin more accurately
- learn to see others' mistakes in light of God's amazing forgiveness towards us
- describe the peace process to follow when we have a conflict with a brother or a sister
- commit to strive to maintain the unity of the Body of Christ, even when there is a price to pay.

He who loves Christ and wants to follow him as a disciple commits to seek the unity of his Church, and make every effort to maintain it. Although the word "unity" is only found twice in the Bible, it is a crucial concept. Let us now look at the word "unity". The definition of the Webster Dictionary is: "the quality or state of being made one; a combination or ordering of parts [...] that constitutes a whole or promotes an undivided total effect". But "unity" does not mean "uniformity". God loves diversity since he created it (Gen. 1:11-25)! So, it is perfectly normal for there to be various opinions about a same subject, and a variety of preferences for one thing or another. But God also loves order (1 Cor. 14:33). Therefore, it is important that this diversity be a wellspring of riches for the church, and not the root of arguments affecting unity.

In the previous lesson, we studied several biblical exhortations articulating the love God wants us to have one for another. We are all the members of one single body, synchronized by Jesus Christ who is the head of this body. Each member contributes to the edification of the body as a whole, each one exercising his gifts and speaking the truth with love in order to grow each member.

To persevere in this sense of the word creates the necessary unity for the church to grow and be blessed. This is why Satan attacks the unity of the church, to destroy God's work. Man is not made to live alone (Gen. 2:18), but living with others often proves to be difficult: conflicts of interest, disagreements, quarrels. These things can in no way honour the shepherd, the head, the leader of the church – Jesus.

We now want to study mutual exhortations in this lesson which seek specifically to support, and when necessary, to restore this unity.

## A. The Foundation of Unity

**Read: Eph. 3:20 – 4:6.**

|What is the glorious vocation to which we should aspire (seek to attain)? Be careful, there are several answers.

*Reflect the glory of God through the Church and our new position as members (3:21)*

*Because we have a glorious future, a hope (4:4)*

*A glorious all-mighty God (4:6)*

*In fact, everything the four first chapters of the letter to the Ephesians teaches is concerned. (4:1)*

*Note to the leader*

*This is an opportunity to go over these teachings.*

|What is the first (reciprocal) exhortation we are to practice as a result?

*To bear one another with love!*

This is a surprising exhortation. Why? We go from a sublime ideal down to a very concrete reality: despite everything the Lord has given us and changed in us we tend to be quite intolerant in the body of Christ.

|Why is it so important to mutually help each other? (v3)

*To preserve unity*

|We are not called to create unity among ourselves, but to **preserve** it. This means unity is already present. Our unity is rooted in what we have in common. Take note of the 7 legacies we share in common according to Eph. 4:4-6. Choose **3 or 4** of them, and write a sentence that explains how our sharing of this legacy should strengthen our unity in Christ. *An example has been provided.*

Legacies	How does our sharing of this legacy strengthen our unity in Christ?
<i>One body</i>	<i>Belonging to one body would imply that we share the same interests.</i>
<i>One spirit</i>	<i>If we are led by the same Spirit, we should seek to agree in our decisions/commitments.</i>
<i>One hope</i>	<i>We will be together to worship God for all eternity—we might as well learn to love each other now!</i>
<i>One Lord</i>	<i>Knowing that we serve one same Lord, we will be less inclined to judge our brother because we also must give an account for ourselves, and we have our own failings.</i>
<i>One faith</i>	<i>We all are inclined to conform to true faith in Christ, which shapes our perspective on life and inspires our commitments.</i>

<i>One baptism</i>	<i>We are united together with Christ and the members of his Body</i>
<i>One God and one Father</i>	<i>Having the same Father will spark love and compassion towards our brother.</i>

Unity will be possible as long as Christians bear one another, act one for another, and are good towards each other. There are other acts of benevolence we shall examine later.

“To bear one another”: the apostle Paul also exhorts the Colossians (Col. 3:13) to mutually bear one another. This time, “to bear one another” means “to be benevolent and accept to receive complaints, even when they are not justified”.

**Read Eph. 4:1-3 and Col. 3:12, 14**, and answer the following questions:

What are the six qualities Paul uses in Eph. 4:2-3 and Col. 3:12, 14 that are the secret to being able to mutually bear one another? (Careful: four of them are present in both texts.)

*Humility; gentleness; patience; love; peace; mercy; kindness; goodness.*

*Note to the leader:*

*The exact words differ from one version of the Bible to another.*

Which one is the link to perfection?

*Love*

Compare this list with the one given in Galatians 5:22. You will notice a strong similarity. According to Gal. 5:22 and Eph. 4:4, who is the one who helps the Christian preserve unity?

*The Holy Spirit of God*

Why do you think there are so many difficulties between brothers and sisters in Christ?

*Open answer*

*Notes to the leader*

*This question introduces the next section on conflicts.*

*It would also be good to conclude this section by reviewing the different aspects of our common heritage in the previous table once more, and perhaps to pray for the preservation of unity as well.*

## B. Conflict and Sin

In order to define the word “conflict”, we cite Ken Sande, the founder of Peacemaker Ministries: *A difference of opinion or intention which frustrates someone’s purposes or desires.*

According to Sande, “There are four primary causes for conflicts.”

- Some quarrels arise from a lack of understanding which originates in mediocre communication (see Joshua 22:10-34).
- Differences in values, purposes, gifts, calls, priorities, expectations, interests and opinions can also lead to conflict (1 Cor. 12:12-31).

- Competition concerning limited resources such as time or money is a frequent cause for quarrel in families, in churches or at work (see Gen. 13:1-12).
- And many conflicts come out of, or worsen, due to sinful habits or attitudes which lead to evil words or actions (see James 4:1-2) \*

1. **Read Acts 15:36-39.** What is the problem mentioned in this passage, and what resulted from it (39a)?

*Here, the problem is one of opinion conflict between Paul and Barnabas. The result was disagreement and separation.*

|To which of the 4 primary causes does this problem correspond?

*To the 2<sup>nd</sup>: a difference of priorities/gifts/opinions*

|Do you think one of the brothers sinned in this case? Defend your answer.

*No. To begin with, there is no sin at the root of the problem because it essentially comes down to a difference of opinion. (It is obviously possible the problem became worse later on as a result of evil words or actions, but this is not necessarily the case).*

Sin is not necessarily present in conflict. Someone may feel offended without another having committed sin, nor even intending to offend them.

2. In the case of a disagreement, what could be stained or even broken in a relationship if the problem is not solved?

*Unity, harmony, trust, friendship, the work that has been done, etc.*

Paul warns Christians to make sure this kind of offense does not lead to sin (Rom. 14:3). He also says it is important to make sure that unintentional wounds do not lead to division. What advice does he give concerning this in Eph. 4:3?

*That Christians should strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

However, other offenses are sins (stealing, insults, treason, lies, despising, adultery, etc.), and are not constructive in a relationship. They oppose two beings created to love one another and shatter their relationship. These kinds of offenses affect a relationship between two people, but also with God.

3. **Read 2 Cor. 2:1-5.** Here, the context is that of a Christian who offended Paul through his bad behaviour. What does Paul experience because of this sin?

*Sadness, pain, anguish, tears, and a deep wound*

4. **Read 2 Cor. 2:6-11.** What solution does Paul suggest in this specific situation?

There are 2 or 3 stages here:

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\* Ken Sande. *The Peacemaker*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004, page ??

*The church, having reprimanded the brother, (the repentance of the brother is implied) was now to show him grace and love, and to forgive and comfort him. The purpose is not to give the victory to Satan who seeks to divide the Church, and thereby destroy the church's testimony.*

*Note to the leader:*

*The purpose here is to emphasize that when sin is found in the church, the vision is always to correct, not reject.*

## C. Grace

 Sin has tainted the thoughts of natural man, and it also is true for Christians. The Church is not spared from misconduct, quarrels and criticisms. If the Church was irreproachable, there would have been no need for Paul to write Ephesians 4! Christians must be renewed in their thoughts, grow in holiness, increase in spiritual maturity and grow in the Lord. In this way, harmony will reign throughout their relationships and God will be glorified. Let us also add that bearing one another does not exclude correcting one another (Gal 6:1)

To "give grace" means to give something that is not deserved.

**Read Matt. 18:23-35.**

|The king's servant had accumulated a debt towards his master. What did he deserve from his master?

*He deserved to be sold as a slave with all his family and belongings to pay back his debt.*

|What was the servant's reaction?

*He implored the king's patience that he might pay.*

|What reaction did the master have when faced with the inability of his servant to repay the debt, and his request for mercy?

*Pity. The king forgave him all his debt and let him walk away.*

|What was the reaction of this same servant when he met a fellow servant who owed him money?

*He seized him by the neck, and required him to pay back what he owed.*

|What was the servant's reaction before his fellow servant's request for mercy?

*He had no mercy and refused to forgive him or grant him grace. He threw him in prison until he could pay back his debt.*

Fill in the following table \*

	The king's servant	The follow servant
Owed amount	<i>Thousands of talents</i>	<i>100 denary</i>
Creditor's reaction	<i>Sell him with his wife and children</i>	<i>He seized his companion by the throat</i>
Request	<i>Be patient with me, and I will fully repay you</i>	<i>Be patient with me, and I will fully repay you</i>
Response	<i>Moved by compassion (to his very bowels) The king cancelled his debt</i>	<i>He refused to wait and had his fellow servant thrown in prison</i>

You have noticed that the king pardoned his servant even though his debt was enormous. But this same servant lacked grace toward one of his fellow servants whose debt was clearly less substantial. In light of this, comment upon Matt. 18:21-22.

*Open answer*

*Example of an answer: All of us who have placed our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation have been acquitted of an enormous debt. Even if we added all of the misunderstandings, failings, even attacks and repetitive curses from our brothers and sisters they could never measure up to this debt. Therefore, we will never have an excuse for failing to imitate our heavenly father by forgiving time and time again a brother who regularly hurts us.*

What conclusions can you deduce concerning grace?

*Open answer*

*Example of an answer: Grace is a gift we do not deserve. The grace of God which saves us is so great that we will never be able to repay our debt to him. We are called to give grace to our brothers and sisters no matter what happens. In this way, we imitate our father.*

*Giving grace does not mean allowing the working of others' sin. We must confront sin with truth and love, and distance ourselves from whoever refuses to admit and change his wrongs. The purpose is not to punish but to reconcile the said brother and restore him in the Lord's grace (Gal. 6:1).*

## D. Forgiveness and Restoration

Let us remember the church is the body of Christ. Its members must therefore be well coordinated for it to function properly. (Eph. 4:16). It is therefore essential to maintain unity, or

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\* Table taken from the book: Djaballah Amar, 1994, Parables of Today, Editions La Clairière, Québec, p249.



to restore it when it is lost. This demands that we resolve any conflict and deal with sin. In this section, we will consider forgiveness and the restoration of him who has sinned. The purposes of this procedure are to glorify God (Matt. 5:16), to preserve the unity of the Church (Eph. 4:3) and restore the sinner (Matt. 18:15-17). As we said, the offense is first toward God, therefore, forgiveness is primarily a divine characteristic. Its purpose is not punishment or rejection, but restoration and reconciling. We may call this procedure “the process of peace”.

Only the offended has the right to offer forgiveness. We can only forgive offenses that personally affect us. **Making peace** is a process that may require several phases

### First phase

The first step is described in Matt. 18:15. “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

*Note to the leader:*

*Some old manuscripts add, “If your brother has sinned **against you**”.*

1. According to this text, when should we admonish our brother?

*When he has sinned*

2. What do you think “admonish” means?

*To point out a problem/Convince him of his offense*

*Note to the leader:*

*It is not always necessary to confront. There are several ways one can communicate the problem (stories, personal examples, etc.). But if a brother still doesn’t understand, one would have to act more formally before proceeding to the next phase.*

3. We are encouraged to carry out this procedure one on one. Why do you think this is important?

*Because proceeding this way avoids the risk of slandering the offender and adding complications to the original problem. Rather, the purpose is to preserve unity and help the person change and move forward.*

4. What does “won your brother over” mean?

*He has listened to the reproach, recognized his sin and asked for forgiveness and is restored in communion with God and with you or the church.*

### Second Phase

But if the offender does not listen, we must move on to the second step of the process. This one is described in Matt. 18:16. “But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”

5. Jesus does not define who should be a witness. But what kind of person would be best in the best position to be a witness (see Gal. 6:1)?

*A Christian mature in the faith filled with the Spirit of God, who knows how to work with gentleness and without taking sides in an argument. It is important for him to be objective and to possess the trust of both sides.*

*Note to the leader:*

*It is not necessarily required that the witness be a pastor or church leader. However, it would be good to invite a church leader along for some serious wrong.*

The witnesses' role is to establish the facts, protect the accused and/or confirm the accusation. In this manner, a false accusation or incrimination is avoided. If the accused still refuses to listen, it would no doubt be wise to repeat this phase. Let us remind ourselves that our purpose is reconciliation, not rejection.

### **Third and Fourth Phases**

The third and fourth steps are described in Matt. 18:17. "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

6. Think about what "tell it to the Church" means in practical terms. (the whole church or only the leaders? During a members-only assembly? During the worship service when unbelievers may be present?)

*Note to the leader:*

*Try to entertain discussion on this point. Here are a few pieces of the answer:*

*As we have said, the process should encourage the restoration of the brother, punishment should not be the ultimate goal.*

*It is not always necessary for non-believers, people who surround the community and people who don't personally know the accused to be involved in the process. We can avoid further humiliating the person by exposing him to the community at large (rather to the elders, a member's assembly—a house or praying meeting).*

*At the same time, it may be good to involve all the members of the church when the sin directly affects the church (theft of church funds, public misconduct, serious wrong of a leader 1 Tim. 5:20) to inspire fear in others through the example of the culprit (1 Tim. 5:20), to encourage prayers for the sinner, to involve the discipline of the community.*

7. What do you think should be the attitude of the church throughout this third step of the process?

*Love the offender and pray for him, not despise him, avoid a spirit of judgment, do not believe oneself to be superior or think to be sheltered from sin.*

*There is a need for firmness; we must also make sure the church is protected from potential danger.*

8. If despite all of this the culprit refuses to listen, what is the fourth step of the process described in Matt. 18:17?

*The church should place the offender at the same level as the pagans.*

*This means that if he still professes to be a Christian brother he should be distanced from the community.*

|What does Jesus mean by the word “pagan”?

*The person is from then on considered to be a non-believer who needs to hear the Gospel once more.*

*Note to the leader:*

*Despite the exclusion of the non-repentant sinner, the church must consider the loss of one of its members as a tragedy, and always hope for his return in the sheepfold.*

|Read Rom. 12:18; 14:19. What should we seek?

*Peace amongst us (toward all) and that which reciprocally edifies.*

|Who is blessed (happy) according to Matt.5:9?

*Those who provide (spread) peace, peacemakers.*

|Here’s a quick mathematical exercise! Peter begins a conversation with Jesus by asking him, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Matt. 18:21, 22.

|What was Jesus’ response?

*Peter was supposed to forgive up to 70 times 7.*

|What do you think Jesus meant? We should forgive:

- ☐ 7 times
- ☐ 77 times
- ☐ 70x7=490
- ☒ not keep count and always forgive

*Note to the leader:*

*In the case of a rivalry, we should not seek to prove someone right or wrong but shed light on the situation to settle the problem and restore peace. Read this story from Djeha:*

### Who is Right?

A great conflict had divided the village in two. Djeha was called upon to resolve the problem. His wife warned him the issue was difficult and that it might end up backfiring on him. But Djeha could not refuse so he decided to face the situation. He went to the market place and faced the villagers gathered into two opposed clans. The proponents of the first group provided their point of view and developed their arguments.

After listening to them, he told them: "You are right."

The proponents of the second group threatened him with their fists and laid out their point of view in order to convince them.

He listened attentively to them and finally told them: "You are also right."

His wife, who was next to him, pulled him by the sleeve and whispered in his ear: "What are you doing? They cannot both be right, it's not possible!"

He replied: "You are also right."

## Application

1. What is the last conflict you had in the past?

*Open answer*

|What was the major reason for it?

*Open answer*

|What was in jeopardy for me? (What did I risk losing?)

*(My reputation, my influence, my money, the time I invested, my project, or the same list but concerning the church)*

|Do I have/did I have specific things I need(ed) to forgive? What are(were) they?

*Open answer*

|Was it worth persevering to correct the problem or wrong? Why?

*Probably "yes", if the wrong done was harmful to the Church or to some other person, or if it might happen again against me, or if the person would benefit at that time from correction).*

*Probably "no", if the wrong concerns me particularly, and I can live with the consequences; or if the benefits of the correction are not worth risking our testimony and the cost—in time, money or with the people involved—of the necessary process to win over the problem.*

|What did I do to resolve the conflict?

*Open answer*

|Did I commit a sin in the beginning, or in my reaction towards the other person? If so, which one(s)

*Open answer*

|What good initiatives and actions did the others do? (Phil 4:8)

*Open answer*

|Did you have to have (or should you have had) a brother or sister intervene to help resolve the problem? (At what point? Why?)

*Open answer*

|What price did you pay to preserve or restore peace? (Col. 3:13; 1 Cor. 6:7-8)

*Open answer*

2. What price did Jesus Christ pay so God would forgive my sins?

*Open answer*

3. What price am I ready to pay now to preserve or restore peace in the conflict already mentioned? / in the church?

*Open answer*

**“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1)**

### ***FOR FURTHER STUDY***

To study the subject further and develop a biblical strategy for harmony and reconciliation on a personal level as well as in your church, you may refer to the following works:

- 1) Ken Sande. *The Peacemaker*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2004.
- 2) Rick Love. *Peacemaking: A study guide*. William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, 2001. (See pages 4-5).

## Lesson 9: The Church in the Future

In this lesson, you will learn what is the glorious hope of the Church.

**At the end of this study, you will be able to:**

- Explain what the illustration of the Church as Christ’s wife means.
- Further appreciate the uncertainty of our current life and the importance of remaining in a state of alertness as we await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Recognize signs of his return and their meaning.
- Describe God’s judgment, the state of the ungodly and of the elect; reflect on the implications for your own life and testimony.

“[...]Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Eph. 5:25-27.

### A. The Church in Wait

As we have seen in lesson 5, the Bible uses illustrations to teach us spiritual truths. These illustrations may concern past times, or times to come. Concerning the future meeting of Jesus Christ and his Church, the Bible uses the illustration of marriage: this occurs in Rev. 19:7 with the “wedding of the lamb.” The Church has been preparing itself to meet up with Christ for two thousand years, so we are now in a time that is bringing us always closer to this day; the believer must remain in the faith concerning the prophecies on the subject. The Christian’s hope lies not in his own death, but in the Lord’s return; this is what he must long for.

1. **Read 2 Peter 3:1-16** and answer the following questions.

|How will the message of Jesus’ return be received in the end times (v 3-4)?

*It will be scoffed at.*

|Does this look like the times we live in?

*Yes*

|What are the skies and the earth of today kept for? (v7)

*For judgment by fire.*

|How can we hasten (as we wait) the day of the Lord? (v9, 12-14; see also Matt. 24:14)

*By having an irreproachable and peaceful conduct/testimony (v14)*

*By proclaiming the Gospel to the whole world (v 9; Matt. 24:14)*

|Read v 9-15a again.

- i. What does “our Lord's patience means salvation” mean (v15a)?

*It gives all men more time to repent and turn to Christ for salvation.*

ii. How can this apply to your own experience?

*Personal answer – For example: There are several of my friends and family members who do not yet believe in Jesus Christ. I still want to encourage them and witness to them, that they also may be saved.*

|How will the day of the Lord come? (10)

*As a thief: suddenly, when not expected*

|Is this why we should possess a holy conduct? Develop your answer. (v11)

*We want to welcome him without shame but joyfully, that we may celebrate eternity together.*

## B. Christ's Return

|We have said **the Christian's hope** lies in the Lord's (the bridegroom's) return to search for his Church (the bride). The New Testament is full of teaching concerning this subject: Christ's return is mentioned in over three hundred verses which demonstrates the importance of this subject.

**Read Acts 1:10-11.**

|Who tells the disciples that the Lord will return?

*Two angels from the sky with the appearance of men*

|How will he return?

*The same way he went up. He will appear in the clouds and will descend to earth in the sight of men.*

|Why did Jesus leave? (John 14:3)

*He is going to prepare a place for us, that we may always be with Him.*

|The signs

"Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Matt. 25:13.

Although we do not know the exact date of his return, we find foreshadowing signs of Christ's return in the New Testament which Jesus himself gave to his disciples. We also find some in the epistles.

Link the references with the signs they describe; in the box "Accomplished/Not yet", mark whether or not you believe this sign has been accomplished or whether you think it has not occurred yet. *An example has been provided.*

References	Signs	Accomplished/Not yet
Matt. 24:4-5	Deception of many - <i>Matt. 24:11-12</i>	<i>Accomplished</i>

Matt. 24:6-7a	Appearance of false Christs	<i>Accomplished</i>
Matt. 24:7	Famine - <i>Matt. 24:7</i>	<i>Accomplished</i>
Matt. 24:8-10	War - <i>Matt. 24:6-7a</i>	<i>Accomplished</i>
Matt. 24:11-12	Plagues - <i>Luke 21:11b</i>	<i>Accomplished</i>
Matt. 24:14	Earthquakes - <i>Luke 21:11a</i>	<i>Accomplished</i>
Matt. 24:15-16	Israel and events - <i>Matt. 24:15-16</i>	<i>Accomplished once under the Roman empire (See Note to the leader: No. 4 below.)</i>
Matt. 24:29-30	Signs in the skies - <i>Matt. 24:29-30</i>	<i>Accomplished in part</i>
Luke 21:11a	The persecution of Christians - <i>Matt. 24:8-10</i>	<i>Accomplished</i>
Luke 21:11b	Gospel is preached to the whole world - <i>Matt. 24:14</i>	<i>Accomplished in part</i>

*Note to the leader:*

- 1. The purpose of this exercise is to help the student understand that these signs have always existed to maintain believers in a hopeful and vigilant attitude.*
- 2. The references in Luke are there for synoptic reasons.*
- 3. v15-16 are not accomplished either...*
- 4. It is clear that Jesus wanted to prepare his disciples to face 2 disturbing events that at his time were still to come: the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in the year 70 (Matt. 24:2) and his glorious return to establish his Kingdom on earth (v3), which we are still awaiting. It is sometimes difficult to discern which of both events is being discussed, (i.e. Matt. 24:15-17) but the attitude we should have toward both of these events is similar, as well as several of their forewarning signs.*



**Jesus chose signs that occur repeatedly during all times and ages; this is to maintain his Church alert and awake. But we must recognize these signs have intensified in the last few years. I.e.: Israel and events. The sign of Mat 24:14 has not quite been fulfilled yet. Indeed, the gospel has been preached to more people, but not yet to everyone.**

## C. The Rapture of the Church

The Lord himself will come to get his Church as we read in 1 Thess. 4:16-17. What a joy to go to his encounter in the sky, and be transformed by his coming (1 Cor. 15:52)! All the detail in the Bible shows us that God has orchestrated all these things, and that every event is planned.

In the following table, write down who is concerned by the event and what will happen according to the provided text.



Verses	Whom does this concern?	What will happen?
Matt. 24:40	<i>2 workers</i>	<i>One is taken away, and the other not</i>
Matt. 24:41	<i>2 women grinding</i>	<i>One is taken away, and the other not</i>
1Cor. 15:50-52	<i>The dead in Christ, and then the living</i>	<i>Our bodies will be transformed and will become incorruptible</i>
1Thess. 4:16-17	<i>We, who are dead in Christ</i>	<i>We will be taken up to heaven to be with the Lord always</i>

#### *Notes to the leader*

*You could ask this application question to the group: What do we learn concerning our personal responsibility in light of his imminent return (Matt. 24:42-50)? (Answer: Watch; be faithful in our Master's service.)*

## **D. The Wedding Times of Christ with his Church.**

When Jesus first came to earth, he gave birth to his relationship with the Church. John the Baptist is the first to talk about Jesus being the Bridegroom. Indeed, John the Baptist's disciples were worried about Jesus and his disciples making more disciples than they were (John 3:26 and 4:1).

1. **Read John 3:26-30.** Here below is a list of phrases taken from this passage; your job is to link them to the right person by writing each of the following phrases in the table, *following the example: Not the Christ.*

- Sent ahead of him (Christ)
- The bride belongs to the bridegroom
- He is the bridegroom
- The friend of the bridegroom
- He must become greater
- I must become less.

Jesus	John the Baptist
<i>The bride belongs to the bridegroom</i>	<i>Not the Christ</i>
<i>He is the bridegroom</i>	<i>Sent ahead of him (Christ)</i>
<i>He must become greater</i>	<i>The friend of the bridegroom</i>
	<i>I must become less</i>

In order to celebrate a marriage, one needs a bride and a bridegroom. The bridegroom is Jesus Christ, his bride is the Church. To celebrate a marriage the couple must also be together in a

specific place at a specific time. In this regard, scripture purposefully leaves us in a state of hope.

|Do we know the hour and the day of the bridegroom's return? **Read Matt. 25:13.**

*No!*

|Develop your answer (Matt. 24:36)

*No one knows: even the Son did not know this when he was living among the men of the earth.*

|We do not know the day or the hour, but Jesus has left us with insight into the end times that can help us. **Read Matt. 24:32-33.** Explain what you think Jesus meant (see also v.44).

*We can be able to discern the time is near without knowing exactly when it will happen. Indeed, Jesus could arrive at any time*

## E. The wedding Ceremony of the Lamb

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.... Then the angel said to me, 'write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God.' (Rev. 19:7, 9)" The covenant of God with his people will therefore be accomplished in a conclusive manner.

|In order to understand the wedding ceremony as John contemplated it (the author of Revelation), it is important to understand how these proceeded during his time. A contract was signed between the two families when the children were still young. Then, the young man's parents (at his request) went to find his future bride who was ready for the ceremony. Finally, the ceremony took place in their future house.

|In the following table, take note of what you learn concerning the bridegroom, the bride or both of them in the following passages:

Verses	What I learn on the Bridegroom/Bride
Eph. 5:25	<i>The bridegroom loves his bride and gives himself up for her.</i>
Eph. 5:27	<i>He desires for her to be pure, perfect and glorious. He does all things to make this to happen.</i>
1 Thess. 4:7	<i>We must note the importance of the Church's purity as the Bride.</i>
1 Pet. 1:8	<i>We love him without having seen him, and we are filled with joy when we think of his return.</i>
1 John 4:19	<i>We love the Bridegroom, Jesus, because he first loved us.</i>
Rev. 19:8	<i>The Bridegroom has prepared good works to clothe the Bride.</i>

|**Read Rev. 3:2-5.** What do these white clothes represent?

*Faithfulness to Jesus Christ and a lifestyle marked by his presence.*

|What do you think the phrase: “was given her to wear” means (19:8)?

*The Bridegroom has planned good works, and all the Bride has to do is put them on!*

*God prepares us and accompanies us in the doing of good works (Eph. 2:10).*

*(We are one in this process.)*

|A Christian is kept in a state of faith that the unbeliever cannot understand. **Read the verses of 2 Pet. 3:3-4**, and fill in the sentence with your own words:

In the last days will come scoffers who will say Where is the ‘coming’ he promised?

|We could be crushed by the ridicule of our peers and by difficult times. But we must remember the story of Noah and his times. **Read Matt. 24:37-38.**

|What were the men doing?

*They ate and drank and gave in marriage.*

|What did Noah do?

*He built the ark and announced God’s judgment*

|Fill-in the blanks for Luke 21:28:

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

## F. The Judgment.

Although his return means joy and gladness for the children of the Lord, on another hand the fate stored up for sinners is terrible.

1. Take note of the phrases the Bible uses concerning suffering of the tied to the Day of Judgment. *An example has been provided.*

- Matt. 25:41: *Eternal fire*
- Mark 9:47: *Hell*
- Mark 9:48: *Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched*
- Rev. 19:20: *The fiery lake of burning sulphur*

*Note to the leader:*

*Gehenna finds its name from the Hebraic expression ge-hinnom, valley of Hinnom. In this site, right next to Jerusalem, children had been burned in honour of the god Molok. Perhaps because of the refuse that was also burned there, the valley of Hinnom became a symbol of sin and affliction; the term eventually was used to refer to a place of eternal torment.*

2. One facet of hell we understand best is probably that of separation from God. Place the following references in their proper place: Matt. 25:41; Acts 1:25; 2 Thess. 1:9; Ps. 109:17.

Man rejects God	God rejects those who reject him
<i>Acts 1:25</i>	<i>Matt. 25:41</i>
<i>Ps. 109:17</i>	<i>2 Thess. 1:9</i>

3. In the book of Revelation, Jesus is described as having eyes of blazing fire: Rev. 19:12. Check the box which you think provides the best explanation:

- ☒ 1. He will see clearly for each one of us.
- ☐ 2. His gaze is pure
- ☒ 3. He tests works by fire
- ☐ 4. He will be hard to fool

*Note to the leader:*

*The correct answer or rather the answer hoped for is answer 3, even though the others are not really false. The gaze of fire will test all works; those works which will have been done without faith in Jesus Christ, "dead works," will not endure his gaze.*

4. Take note of the words or expressions which speak of suffering in the following verses: Matt. 8:12; Matt. 13:42; Rev. 14:11; Rev. 20:10. Write the words or expressions which speak of suffering in the box on the right:

<b>Matt. 8:12</b>	<i>Outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping/gnashing of teeth</i>
<b>Matt. 13:42</b>	<i>Fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth</i>
<b>Rev. 14:11</b>	<i>The smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest</i>
<b>Rev. 20:10</b>	<i>They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever</i>

Where will the righteous go and where will the unrighteous go? **Read Matt. 25:46.**

*The righteous will go to eternal life. The unrighteous will go to eternal punishment.*

## G. The Church in Eternity

Since ancient times, God declares that he will completely change the "things of the past," and that he will do so with a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth (Is. 65:17).

1. According to the following verses, fill-in the following columns by indicating what will not exist in the kingdom of heaven (left column), and what will not enter into it (right column):

Will not exist (Rev. 21:4)	Will not enter (Rev. 21:27)
<i>Weapons</i>	<i>That which is soiled</i>
<i>Death</i>	<i>The deceitful</i>
<i>Grief</i>	<i>The shameful</i>
<i>Crying or pain</i>	

*Note: In Rev 22:15 the list of “those who will not enter” is further expanded.*

2. Still today we understand the truths of eternity rather poorly (1 Cor. 13:12). Soon we will see, understand and serve the Lord. **Read Rev. 22:2-5, 14.**

|Where will the thrones of god and the Lamb be?

*In the midst of the city*

|What will be written on our foreheads?

*The name of Jesus.*

|Why will there no longer be a night?

*Because the Lord will always be among us.*

|Will we reign with him? yes/no.

*Yes*

|On what condition? **Read 2 Timothy 2:12.**

*If we endure and suffer with Him*

*Note to the leader:*

*The believer stands firm in his faith thanks to the grace of God living in him. Phil 1:6*

|For how long?

*Forever*

3. **Read Rev. 22:2; 14 and Genesis 2:9; 3:22.** In heaven man will have the right to the tree of life, which was forbidden to him in the Garden of Eden. Why do you think God closed access to this tree to Adam, but will open its access in heaven? (See also Rev. 2:7.)

*God renews the things that had been broken in the Garden of Eden. Fallen man would have lived in sin for all eternity if God had not refused him access to the tree. Regenerated man can now eat and live eternally in the presence of God.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

### The Church in Waiting

Obviously, the young bridegroom was full of joy and impatient to find his bride and live with her once and for all. In the same way, the bride rejoices over this appointment, and her heart desires this moment.

#### 1. Complete the following verses:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” (Rev. 19:7-9)

#### 2. The parable of the master and of the servant (Mat 24:42-50) or that of the 10 virgins (Mat 25:1-13) teach us that our wait of meeting him must not be in despair, even when times seem long or uncertain. Complete the following tables, taken from the parable of the servant (Mat 24:42-50):

	Mission	Attitude	Actions	Master's reaction
<b>Good servant</b> Verses 45-47	<i>Provide food for colleagues</i>	<i>He stays diligently busy with faithfulness in awaiting the return of the master</i>	<i>Is feeding colleagues as he should.</i>	<i>He will put him over all his possessions</i>
<b>Bad servant</b> Verses 48-51	<i>Provide food for colleagues</i>	<i>“My master is taking a long time.”; impatience</i>	<i>Eating and drinking with his friends, neglecting his duties</i>	<i>He will cut him to pieces; will scourge and punish him</i>

## EGLI 201: Church Life - Questions for Review

### Lesson 1

1. Describe the relationship of God with his people, and the mutual relationships of the people under the Old Covenant.
2. What was the role of God's people towards the nations in the Old Testament?

### Lesson 2

3. What advantages do the people of God enjoy under the New Covenant compared to the Old?
4. What differences are there in the constitution of the Church compared to the people of God under the Old Covenant?

### Lesson 3

5. Describe the role of the first Apostles in the establishment of the Church following Jesus' death. Explain how they have ensured the growth of the Church and prepared their relief from responsibilities. What lessons can we draw for ourselves today?
6. Comment upon the birth of the Church in Jerusalem and the communal life in Acts 2:1-47.

### Lesson 4

7. When Jesus told his first disciples, "You will be my witnesses... even to the ends of the earth," they could not comprehend the depth or range of this mission. What did they have to learn and how did God lead his disciples to enlarge their vision and participate in its fulfilment?
8. How is the church of Antioch a model for the ministry of a local church?

*Note to the leader:*

*Alternative question: What is the role of the local church in planting new churches? What principles should we follow when establishing new churches?*

### Lesson 5

9. Write down the five illustrations of Christ's Church.

Give a brief description (1 or 2 sentences) of each one with a key verse. Then

Develop in a paragraph what these illustrations teach us about our relationship as a Church toward God; *OR*, write a paragraph on the illustration you find most relevant to your life.

10. What do these Church illustrations teach us concerning our mutual relationships as believers in Jesus Christ?

**Lesson 6**

11. What does Eph. 4:1-17 teach us concerning the importance of the local church for each believer in Christ?
12. What is a sacrament? Explain concisely the meaning of each sacrament, and give a few principles that guide your personal life in observing them.

**Lesson 7**

13. Cite 5 biblical reciprocal (one another) commandments which regulate the communal life of believers in Christ. What do these exhortations teach us of the love that is required of us towards one another?
14. Explain what the following biblical texts teaches us concerning
- spiritual gifts given to believers in Jesus Christ: 1 Pet. 4:10-11
  - the principles we should follow in managing offerings in the church: 1 Cor. 16:1-4
  - how we are to edify the Church in our mutual relationships: Eph. 4:15

**Lesson 8**

15. As a committed member of a local Church, describe your personal responsibility in maintaining unity, and the specific actions you will take to accomplish this.

*Note to the leader:*

*Here is an alternative question that might work well during an exam or oral review in the form of a sketch: A brother complains about another brother in the community. It is obvious that the very presence of the other brother is painful to him. How could you encourage this brother to exercise love in this situation? What biblical passages and principles could be mentioned/considered?*

16. Describe “the peace process” we should follow to restore a brother/sister taken by sin.

**Lesson 9**

17. What do we learn of the events surrounding the return of Christ in Matt. 24?
18. Contrast the life of Jesus Christ’s Church in Eternity with the state of the unbelieving. What conclusions should be drawn from this?



**Here is the answer to the first question for the Lesson 1 review, as an example:**

1. Describe the relationship of God with his people, and the mutual relationships of the people under the Old Covenant.

*God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, a special relationship with a commitment through which God promised to bless and protect his people who owed him obedience in return. After a sojourn in Egypt, God freed the people (of Israel, descendants of Abraham) and lead them under Moses to the promise land: Canaan.*

*In this relationship through covenant, God regarded this people as belonging particularly to him from among all the peoples of the earth (Ex. 19:5-6). God revealed himself as a king towards his people (Ps. 47), a shepherd towards his flock and a wine grower towards his vine (Ps. 80). God permanently established his dwelling place with them through the transportable tabernacle in the desert, and later through the temple in Jerusalem (Lev. 26:11-12; 1 Kings 6).*

*The role of the people was to reflect the holiness and goodness of God (Lev. 11:44) toward the other nations, and to intercede for them as priests (Ex. 19:5-6). The people committed to aligning their conduct according to God's commandments (Ex. 20) which brought them blessing and prosperity from God. (Deut. 28:1-14). On the other hand, disobedience lead to curses: plague, poor harvests, invasions, etc. (Deut. 28:15-27). Unfortunately, the heart of the people strayed from God and turned towards idols to the point where God exiled them to Babylon (Ez. 36:17-19) and promised to re-establish them with a new heart (Jer. 31:31).*

*By respecting God's law, the people ensured justice and solidarity of all the members of the community. The tithes and offerings ensured the necessary resources for support, worship, priests and also to assist the poor.*

*Note to the leader:*

*It is important to emphasize the similarities of these with the Church if the participants do not see it themselves.*

*To receive the correction of the exams by the "Progressing Together" team, or to obtain prepared answers for the other review questions, contact us at [info@ProgressingTogether.com](mailto:info@ProgressingTogether.com).*