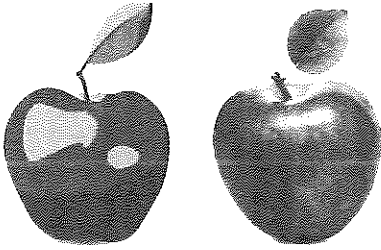


God Works



Topic

The church

Theme

God works through the church, His program for this age.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine to encourage his pastor and to be a part of his church's mission.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 11
- Rubber bands
- Glass tumbler
- Jar with a lid
- Paint can and paintbrush

Scripture Focus

Various passages

Summary

The church is God's program for this age. Christ is both the head and builder of the church. God expects us to be active in a local church and to function together as the body of Christ.

Outline

I. The Church Is God's Idea

- A. It is not a human institution (1 Cor. 1:10–31; 11:18–34; 12:4–7)
- B. It is a product of God's wisdom (Rom. 11:25–36)

II. Christ Is Active in the Church

- A. He is its foundation and founder (Matt. 16:16–18; 1 Cor. 3:11)
- B. He is its builder and head (1 Cor. 12:11–13; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18)
- C. He is its instructor (Matt. 28:18–20; John 16:12–15)

III. The Pastor Is God's Man

- A. The pastor equips the church to serve (Eph. 4:11, 12)
- B. The church honors its pastor (1 Cor. 9:9–11, 14; Heb. 13:17)

Memory Verse

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

Good or Bad?

Organize your learners into two groups. Assign one group to develop three arguments to support the belief that matchsticks are good. Have the other group develop three arguments to support the belief that matchsticks are bad. Give them a few minutes to come up with their arguments. Then have them present their sides. If time have each side give a brief rebuttal.

ASK: What might cause a person to believe matchsticks are either good or bad? *Their experiences with matchsticks. For example, having them to light a fire on a camping trip is good, while having someone use them to burn your house down is bad.*

ASK: Why might some people argue that church is bad? *The have had bad experiences with church. Perhaps, the people in the church mistreated them.*

Church is God's idea. He planned it and Christ founded it. But like the matches, the church can be misused. Consequently, some people abandon the church. This lesson will examine the reality of church and the vital part it plays in our lives.

Unintended Uses

Demonstrate the following alternative uses for rubber bands. Collect a jar with a lid, a glass tumbler, a paint can, and a paintbrush to use in the demonstrations.

- Wrap a rubber band a couple of times around the outside of the lid on the jar. This gives you a better grip when you can't open the lid because your hand is slipping.
- Wrap three rubber bands around the outside of the glass tumbler. This gives a child a better grip on the glass and keeps him dropping it.
- Wrap a rubber band around a paint can so the band crosses the middle of the opening of the can. The rubber band provides a place to wipe the excess paint off your brush and keep extra paint from getting all over the outside of the can.

Organize your learners into groups of four or five. Give each group a couple of rubber bands and task them with coming up with one new way to use their rubber bands. The use doesn't necessarily need to be constructive. After a few minutes have the groups share their ideas.

ASK: What are some devious uses for rubber bands? (Q1) *Snapping or shooting someone with them.*

ASK: What might Stephen Perry, the first to patent rubber bands, think of boys snapping their sisters with rubber bands? (Q2)

People repurpose inventions and use them in new ways. Sometimes the new uses, as with rubber bands, aren't so good. The local church is God's idea. Unfortunately

some people have used it in ways God never intended and would never approve. This lesson will examine the reality of church and the vital part it plays in our lives.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

As we learned in the previous lesson, we must handle God's Word well. The teaching and preaching ministries discussed in that lesson are to take place in the context of a local church. The reality of the local church is the focus for this lesson.

I. The Church Is God's Idea

A. It is not a human institution (1 Cor. 1:10–31; 11:18–34; 12:4–7)

The local church is God's invention. He came up with the idea. But what church is to some people is not what God designed it to be.

Some believers have made church their club. They like to go and hang out with their friends, but they aren't too interested in the actual work of the church. The opportunity for a social outlet keeps them coming back.

READ: 1 Corinthians 12:4–7. **ASK:** What message do these verses send to those who want to use church as a club? (Q3) *God gives every believer the Holy Spirit as well as spiritual gifts so that they can use them in the church for the benefit of others. Church is not simply a social outlet.*

See James 2:1–13 for a discussion about showing partiality in church, a topic related to what was happening with the Lord's Supper observance in Corinth.

Others see church as a runway they can use to draw attention to themselves. They attend so they can show off their latest outfit or jewelry, brag about their recent vacation, or display their "ride." They are preoccupied with who has what and who went where. The church at Corinth had turned the Lord's Supper into an opportunity for members to show off their status (1 Cor. 11:18–21). They gathered for a meal before observing the Lord's Supper. Some members brought their large, lavish meals to advertise their social status, while others went hungry with little or nothing to eat. The braggarts despised, or thought lightly of, the church of God and shamed those who didn't have much (1 Cor. 11:22).

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:27–34. **ASK:** Summarize Paul's message to the Corinthians on the matter of misusing the Lord's Supper. (Q4) *God expects believers to love and care for one another. He will chasten those who use church as a runway to draw attention to themselves.*

Still others see church as a competition for the title of holiest member. These people will make sure they are seen "serving" in the church. They will talk about their "humble" service for God and how many hours they have invested in it. The Corinthians who claimed to be disciples of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ reflected this desire to be seen as the holiest (1 Cor. 1:10–12). Paul reminded them that Christ was not divided (1:13). And Christ had not chosen them because they were "wise," "mighty," and "noble" (1:26). This meant they had no reason to glory in themselves (1:29). If anyone was to glory, it was to be in the Lord (1:31).

ASK: Why might some believers treat church as a club, runway, or competition? (Q5) *They are living according to their flesh instead of according to the Spirit.*

Church is not a club, a runway, or a competition. It is God's program and therefore a heavenly institution. When we understand the church's heavenly origin, we should treat it seriously rather than flippantly and selfishly.

B. It is a product of God's wisdom (Rom. 11:25–36)

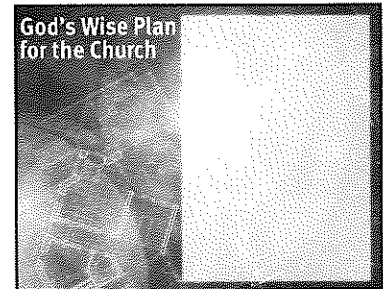
The apostle Paul talked about God's grand plan in his epistle to the Romans (Rom. 11). He explained how God has set aside Israel and is now dealing with the Gentiles, or the rest of humanity. God is not done with Israel. One day they will return to Him, and He will again deal directly with His people (11:25–27). But until then, the church is God's main focus.

As Paul contemplated God's plan, he couldn't help but praise God for His "wisdom and knowledge" (11:33). Both God's wisdom in planning salvation and His knowledge of us are "past finding out." That means we could never fully understand God's mind. It is from this wisdom and knowledge that God planned the church.

READ: Romans 11:33. **ASK:** What illustration could you use to show the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge? (Q6) *Perhaps our inability to explore the vastness of the universe would give us a glimpse of the depth of God's unsearchable wisdom and knowledge.*

READ: Romans 11:34. **ASK:** What is Paul communicating with the two rhetorical questions in this verse? (Q7) *That no one could possibly give God advice or instructions because no one could ever be as intelligent as God.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 11. **ASK:** How should we respond to the fact that God planned the church with His unfathomable wisdom and knowledge? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q8) *We should take church seriously. We should seek to know what God says about it in His Word. We should endeavor to live according to God's plan for the church. We should not try to make it something He never intended it to be.*



Because the local church is God's program for this age, nothing should be more important to us. We should be in tune with what God wants to accomplish in the church. Church should not be something we do on the side; we should devote our lives to serving Christ in the context of the church.

We should also want to know what our part is in God's program. Instead of worrying about whether a church fits our style or meets our needs, we ought to be rolling up our sleeves and asking to be part of the work.

II. Christ Is Active in the Church

While church is part of God's wise plan, it is Christ Who is its founder, foundation, builder, and instructor. Learning the reality of Christ's role in the church helps us see just how vital it is. We should never think of church as ho-hum. Christ's investment in it was too high to ever make church unimportant.

A. He is its foundation and founder (Matt. 16:16–18; 1 Cor. 3:11)

Most organizations have a founder; none of those founders would also call themselves the foundation of the organization. Christ is both the founder and foundation of the church.

Picking up the topic of schisms in the church at Corinth, Paul wrote about Christ's role as the foundation of the church. Paul said he laid the foundation and that others built on it. Paul laid the foundation by preaching the gospel. He then made it clear that Christ is the only foundation for the church that anyone could lay (1 Cor. 3:11).

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:11. **ASK:** Why can the church have no other foundation than Christ Jesus? (Q9) *Because no one else died for the sins of the world as Jesus Christ did. He is the foundation of the church because He laid down His life for the church.*

Christ made the ultimate investment in the church by laying down His life for it. By rising from the dead, He became the foundation of the church. Without Christ's death and resurrection, the church is meaningless and our faith is worthless (1 Cor. 15:17).

Christ is also the church's founder in the sense that He started the church. He first talked of the church's beginning to His disciples as part of a conversation about His identity. Peter spoke up and rightly said that Jesus is the "Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16, 17).

Christ then said He would build His church on "this rock" (16:18). The context does not say who or what the "rock" is. Most likely it is Christ when passages like 1 Corinthians 3:11 are taken into consideration. So Christ became the foundation for the church and then started building the church as its founder.

B. He is its builder and head (1 Cor. 12:11–13; Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18)

Some people think that since Jesus said He would build His church, then all they need to do is get out of the way and let Him do His building. Consequently, they don't reach out to the lost to evangelize them, and they don't even make much of an effort to get to know their neighbors. They figure that Jesus will do the work for them. What they don't understand is that Jesus does the work *through* them, not *for* them. Jesus is building His church, but He does it through believers.

READ: Ephesians 1:22, 23; Colossians 1:18.

Lesson 10 develops the work of the church more thoroughly, including a section on spiritual gifts.

As the church's builder, Jesus is also the head of the church (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:18). All believers make up His body. Each local church is a microcosm of the entire group of believers that make up the total body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). This head and body metaphor helps us understand both Christ's role and the church's role in building the church. Christ empowers His body through the Spirit, Who gives believers spiritual gifts to use in service (12:11). Christ also feeds His body by His Word and loves His body (Eph. 5:25–30). Believers then serve as Christ directs them. They are His hands and feet in ministry. As they reach out in His power and

under His direction, Christ works through them. Souls are saved and disciplined. Christ's church is built! And the glory goes to Christ.

ASK: How does understanding that Christ is the head and builder of your church motivate you to be a part of the work of the church? (Q10)

C. He is its instructor (Matt. 28:18–20; John 16:12–15)

As its head, Christ commissioned the church to make disciples (Matt. 28:18–20).

READ: Matthew 28:18–20.

Part of the disciple-making process involves teaching what Christ commanded. This is not a reference to whatever Christ commanded while He was on earth. It mainly refers to the commands Jesus gave through those who wrote the Epistles.

READ: John 16:12–15. **ASK:** Whose words did the Holy Spirit declare to the writers of the Epistles? (Q11) *The Holy Spirit took Christ's words and declared them to the writers.*

Christ provided the Epistles as the instruction manual for making disciples. The rest of the Bible is valuable to us (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) in that it teaches us about God, His plan, His interaction with people, and how people of faith related to God. But the bulk of the directives for the church are found in the Epistles.

While the Bible makes it clear that we are not *under the law*, we are *under grace* (Rom. 6:16–22). That does not mean we are free from any commands and that we have a free pass to sin as we please. Grace gives us guidelines for life as a believer. As a result, there are numerous commands for believers in the Epistles.

In commissioning the church, Christ gave the command to make disciples, the only imperative found in His instructions. So when the church teaches what Christ commanded, His command to make disciples should be part of what they teach. Disciple makers, then, teach disciples to become disciple makers.

ASK: What would happen to your church if every member followed the Great Commission and made disciples who then became disciple makers? (Q12) *The church would be obedient to Christ and would grow exponentially.*

Law & Grace by Myron Houghton gives a detailed explanation of what it means to live under grace. The book is available at RegularBaptistPress.org.

III. The Pastor Is God's Man

A. The pastor equips the church to serve (Eph. 4:11, 12)

Though Christ has an active, leading role in the church, He appoints pastors to work under Him. That does not mean the rest of the church becomes spectators as the pastor works. Nor does it mean the pastor grabs all the work and doesn't let anyone else get involved.

READ: Ephesians 4:11, 12. **ASK:** What is the pastor's main role in the church? (Q13) *Equipping the people for the disciple-making work of the ministry.*

Inactive churches conclude that they have contributed their part to the

work of the ministry by simply paying their pastor. If his workload is too much, then they hire an assistant for him. The people in the congregation, after all, have their own jobs and responsibilities to take care of. Of course, on special anniversaries and at Christmas the church pools their resources to recognize the pastor for his hard work. They pat him on the back and give him a gift or check and hope he doesn't expect them to get too involved in actually working in the church.

ASK: How should a mostly inactive church show their overloaded pastor their appreciation? (Q14) *By getting involved in making disciples.*

Sitting idly by and praying your pastor will have strength to do *all* the work of the ministry is a prayer God simply won't hear.

ASK: How should an inactive church pray for their pastor? (Q15) *They should confess their sin of inactivity, offer themselves to the Lord, and pray their pastor would have the wisdom to equip them to serve in the church.*

B. The church honors its pastor (1 Cor. 9:9–11, 14; Heb. 13:17)

Some church members need to be *less* active. Namely, those members who try to control and mold their pastor into what they think he should be. Needling comments, critical notes, and gossip are some of the common ways members attempt to influence their pastor. Others go so far as to make the pastor's life so miserable that he leaves the church.

The pastor shouldn't be above constructive criticism. But he is God's man for the church. And as God's man, the church needs to honor him and support him (1 Cor. 9:9–11, 14).

READ: Hebrews 13:17. **ASK:** What does God require of church members? (Q16) *To submit to their pastor and to follow his lead.*

Biblical SLAVE Leadership by Daniel L. Anderson is an excellent book on the pastor's ministry as a stewardship from God. It is available at RegularBaptistPress.org.

The pastor is responsible to Christ and must give an account to Him for what he did as a steward of Christ's church. His accounting will be with joy if his church was submissive. If not, he will grieve for them, but the church will be the one that will suffer loss, not the pastor (Heb. 13:17).

Some churches take their pastor's ministry flippantly. They move pastors in and out as if they are changing carpet or drapes. It is imperative that churches cherish and honor their pastor and treat him as God's man to teach and equip them.

The reality of the connection between how church members respond to their pastor and how they will fair at the Judgment Seat of Christ needs to be rehearsed by each church member. They need to be touched with the thought of their pastor grieving before Christ at their lack of response to his spiritual leadership. Most pastors actually already grieve over their churches and pray they would begin to live in the real and to be the flock that Christ wants them to be. Positively, those church members who respond to their pastor will cause their pastor much joy as he stands before Christ.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

God's Idea

ASK: How have you viewed church? Have you seen it as a club, a runway, or a competition? (Q17)

ASK: How has your perception of church changed as a result of this lesson on the reality of church? (Q18)

ASK: What could you do to be a part of our church's mission of making disciples? (Q19)

God's Man

Your response and relationship to your pastor is far more serious and consequential than you probably realized.

ASK: How have you responded to your pastor's ministry? (Q20)

ASK: What will you do to encourage your pastor? Pray for him? Offer yourself to be active in the work of the church? (Q21)

Summary and Memory Verse

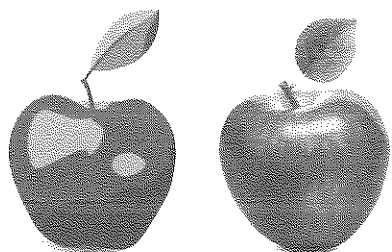
RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 9 or use the following: Take an active part in Christ's church.

Encourage learners to memorize Hebrews 13:17. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

Living in the Real

1. Wake up to reality!	8. Handle God's Word as God intended.
2. Live in response to Who God is.	9. Take an active part in Christ's church.
3. Live in response to God's person.	10.
4. Walk in newness of life as God's redeemed.	11.
5. Boldly approach the throne of grace.	12.
6. Live in the power of the Spirit.	13.
7. Value and study the Bible as God's very words.	

God Sends



Topic

Christian service

Theme

God commands believers to lovingly exercise their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the church.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine ways to enhance and use his spiritual gifts.

Materials

- Resources 1, 12, and 13
- Pair of shoes
- Candy bar
- Cooking pot
- Jumper cables

Scripture Focus

Acts 1:8; 2:1–4; Rom. 12:7, 8; 1 Cor. 12:27, 28; Eph. 2:8–10; 4:11–16; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11

Summary

God saved us so we might serve Him and bring glory to His name. The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve, gives us spiritual gifts, and edifies others as we use our spiritual gifts.

Outline

I. God's Reasons for Our Service

- A. To fulfill our purpose (Eph. 2:8–10)
- B. To glorify God (1 Pet. 4:10, 11)

II. The Spirit's Role in Our Service

- A. He empowers us for service (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4)
- B. He endows us for service
 - 1. Descriptions of speaking gifts (Rom. 12:7, 8; Eph. 4:11)
 - 2. Descriptions of serving gifts (Rom. 12:7, 8; 1 Cor. 12:28)
 - 3. Determination of gifts (1 Pet. 4:10)
- C. He edifies through our service (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Pet. 4:10)

Memory Verse

*"As every man hath received the gift,
even so minister the same one to another,
as good stewards of the manifold grace of God"
(1 Peter 4:10).*