Going Deeper bibletime

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A12 - The Church

Study 1 - Pictures of the Church

BIBLE READING:

**1 Corinthians 3: 16-17;
2 Corinthians 11: 1-4;
Ephesians 2: 19-22; Ephesians 5: 25-27**

KEY VERSE:

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"

1 Corinthians 3: 16

In A11 we thought mainly about the church in its widest sense. By this we mean the entire company of Christians, from the Day of Pentecost to the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

Within these limits, all who genuinely believe in Him as their Saviour and Lord, are His church. Neither nationality, race, nor religious denomination play any part in it - they are ***"all one in Christ Jesus". (Galatians 3: 28)*** There are many verses where the word 'church' is used in this inclusive sense. ***(See Ephesians 5: 25 and Colossians 1: 18)***

It is equally clear that sometimes the word 'church' is used in a specific geographical sense. We read, for example, about ***"the church of God that is in Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1: 2)*** and about the church in Philemon's house. ***(Philemon 1: 2)*** When used in this sense, 'church' is referring to a company of Christians who are all living in the same general area. They comprise what may be termed 'a local church'.

The New Testament, then, has TWO distinct ideas:-

1. ONE 'complete church', made up of all true Christians.
2. MANY 'local churches', made up of believers in a given area.

The Bible uses a number of 'pictures', or metaphors, to help us understand the character of the church. Interestingly, the same 'picture' may be used to describe BOTH aspects of the church. In this Study we shall examine how both the complete church and a local church are spoken of as ***"a temple and a bride"***. In Study 2 we will consider another picture, ***"the church as a body"***.

THE COMPLETE CHURCH - "THE TEMPLE OF GOD"

Paul writes to the Christians at Ephesus about ***"the foundation", "the cornerstone",*** and ***"the whole structure". (Ephesians 2: 19-22)*** We must remember that he is using these words in a figurative sense; he is not thinking about a literal temple. What he is teaching is that believers, from many countries and from many centuries, have been brought into such a wonderful relationship with God that they have become His "***dwelling-place"***! Being ***"built together"***, they have become ***"a holy temple in the Lord". (Ephesians 2: 20-22)***

THE LOCAL CHURCH - THE TEMPLE OF GOD

1 Corinthians 3: 16 teaches us that a group of Christians who are 'a church' may be viewed as "God's temple". This implies at least TWO things:-

a) Because they are ***"God's temple"***, they must not allow any wrong practices, or sinful behaviour, to have a place in their church-life. ***(1 Corinthians 3: 17)***

b) Because they are ***"God's temple"***, they can humbly claim to have God's presence with them, empowering them in their worship and in their work for Him.

THE COMPLETE CHURCH - THE BRIDE

Ephesians 5 contains valuable instruction for Christian husbands and wives about their relationships with each other. To press home his teaching, Paul calls attention to the very best pattern, when he writes, ***"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her". (verse 25)*** Although he does not use the word 'bride', ***verses 26-27*** clearly present the picture of the whole church being like a bride who is being prepared for the day of her marriage. The Lord Jesus has an intense love for His church and paid a great price to secure her for Himself.

THE LOCAL CHURCH - A BRIDE

In ***2 Corinthians 11: 1-4***, Paul is concerned that the church at Corinth is going to prove unfaithful to the Lord and turn aside to a "***different gospel"***. In ***verse 2*** he reminds them of the need to be pure and holy as the bride of Christ. He is warning them that, as a church, they must remain totally faithful and devoted to the Lord Jesus.

The Bible also promises a reunion between Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. When the Lord Jesus returns in the prophesied Second Coming, He will celebrate with His bride in a wedding ceremony where the two will be united forever. ***(Revelation 19: 6-8)*** Until then, members of the church are encouraged to be faithful and to be ready, waiting with anticipation for that glorious day.

This is the second of two units on
The Church.

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A12 - The Church

Study 2 - The Church as a Body

BIBLE READING:

1 Corinthians 12: 12-27; Ephesians 1: 22-23; Colossians 1: 18

KEY VERSE:

"Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it."

1 Corinthians 12: 27

In this study, we shall look at another metaphor or 'picture' which applies to both the complete church and local church - a body.

1. THE COMPLETE CHURCH - A BODY

Christ's church, in its widest sense, is made up of people from many generations and from many differing backgrounds. But these differences become of no importance because, in coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, they have become a spiritual unity, just as a human body is a physical unity with life flowing through every part of it. Every movement and function in our natural bodies is controlled by the brain, which is located in the head. This fact provides a clear illustration of New Testament teaching about the church, for it declares that Christ is ***"the Head of the body, the church". (Ephesians 1: 22-23 and Colossians 1: 18)***

In using the idea of a body to describe the whole church, the Bible is emphasising TWO main points:

a) The spiritual unity of all true Christians, from whatever circumstances they have come.
b) The total authority and supremacy of the Lord Jesus, as Head of His church.

2. A LOCAL CHURCH - A BODY

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he addressed it to ***"the church of God that is in Corinth"***- a local church. ***(1 Corinthians 1: 2)*** In ***chapter 12: 27***, he introduces the metaphor or 'picture' of a body when he writes, ***"Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it"***. Note the following:

a) In a church, as in a body, there is UNITY and DIVERSITY. ***("one body"; "many members")*** A body has many differing members, yet it is one! There is a wonderful unity in a body, for life is in every part of it. A church is also like that - all its members are ***"one in Christ Jesus". (Galatians 3: 28)*** They each possess spiritual life from Him. Because of this, we should always do our best to maintain harmony amongst the members of the church.

b) In our bodies, each part has its own task to do. The foot cannot do the hand's job. Neither can the ear substitute for the eye! (See ***1 Corinthians 12: 14-19***) Similarly in the church each member matters and has equal importance. We should never become proud and self-important, and think the weaker members are unnecessary! There is individual responsibility to learn which task God intends each of us to do. A body is at its best when each part is doing what it is intended to do.

c) Our physical bodies demonstrate clearly how one member depends on another. How often the eye needs the fingers to wipe away a speck of grit! Likewise the head is totally dependent upon the feet to take it to its desired destination! (See ***1 Corinthians 12: 21***) This illustrates how the members of a church need each other. In the church body what is happening to one member, whether it is suffering or rejoicing affects the others. (See ***1 Corinthians 12: 25-26***)

How are church members to show this interdependence and support each other? Before the church was born, Jesus told His disciples, ***"I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." (John 13: 34)*** We are to love each other in the way that Jesus loves us! When you are reading the epistles, look out for the phrase **"each other"** or ***"one another"***. These phrases are used in specific instructions which confirm that no Christian is 'an island' but must rather obey Christ's commandment to demonstrate love through our actions to other believers. Some examples include the various readers being told to accept, honour, serve, comfort, be kind to and encourage each other.

What wonderful places our churches will be if we are effective in living collectively as the body of Christ. As ***John 13: 35*** explains, we will be a strong witness to those who are looking on! The challenge is for each member personally - how well are you playing your part in 'the body' which is the local church?

This is the second of two units on
The Church.

Answer Sheet
A12 - The Church
Study 1 - Pictures of the Church

Leader's Comments:

Name: Return address on back of answer sheet

Address:

1. Circle the references which refer to local churches.

Matthew 16: 18	***Acts 9: 31***	***Romans 16: 5***	***1 Corinthians 16: 19***
Ephesians 3: 10	***Ephesians 5: 25***	***Colossians 1 :18***	***1 Thessalonians 1: 1***

/4

2 Write TRUE or FALSE after each statement about the temple of God:

a) It is a literal building, as referred to in ***1 Corinthians 3: 16***. _____

b) It refers to both the complete and the local church. _____

c) The temple of God will not be complete until the end of this age. _____

/3

3. Paul speaks of the whole church as *"a holy temple in the Lord"* in *Ephesians 2: 19-22*.

a) Who does he say is the foundation? _____

b) Who is the chief cornerstone? _____

c) What do you think the words ***"a dwelling place for God by the Spirit"*** mean? _____

_____

/3

4. Read *1 Corinthians 3: 16-17* again.

a) Why did the church at Corinth have to take care not to allow sinful practices and wrong teachings to gain a foothold?

_____

b) What other implications does your answer have for the functioning of the church at Corinth?

_____

/4

5. Read *Ephesians 5: 25* and answer the following:

a) Upon what is the love of a Christian husband for his wife to be modelled?

_____

b) What 'price' did Christ pay for His Bride, the church?

_____

/2

6. Answer the following questions:

a) Write out words and phrases from ***Ephesians 5: 27*** which tell us that the whole church will be completely pleasing to God in the day when the church, as 'the bride', is presented to Christ.

_____

b) Read ***Revelation 19: 6-8***.

Who will receive glory on this day? ***(verse 7)*** _____

What name is given to this great event? ***(verse 7)*** _____

What will the Bride of Christ be given to wear? ***(verse 8)*** _____

/7

7. Paul uses the 'picture' of the bride of Christ as a motivation for the church at Corinth to follow the right teaching.

a) What is the danger they could fall into? ***(verses 3-4)*** _____

b) What two words are used to describe the devotion they should have to Christ? ***(verse 3)*** _____

/2

THINK: Think about the privileges and responsibilities associated with being in the church which is the ***"temple of God"*** and the ***"bride of Christ"***. Give thanks and ask God to help you in your life as a member.

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet
A12 - The Church
Study 2 - The Church as a Body

Leader's Comments:

1. *Colossians 1: 18* speaks of Christ as *"the Head of the body, the church"*.

a) What qualities does Christ have as the Head of His church? _____

_____

b) As members of the church body, what is our relationship to the Head? _____

_____ /4

2. Answer the following questions:

a) To whom is the book of ***1 Corinthians*** written? ***(1 Corinthians 1: 2)*** _____ /3

b) Fill in the missing words in this sentence from ***1 Corinthians 12: 12***

The body is _____ but the members are _____ .

3. Answer the following questions:

a) List the four members of the body mentioned in ***1 Corinthians 12: 15-16***.

i) _____ ii) _____ iii) _____ iv) _____

b) What is the main point of Paul's teaching in these two verses? _____

_____ /5

4. Write TRUE or FALSE after the following statements

a) The New Testament likens a church, in any given place, to a body. _____

b) Just as some parts of a body are useless, so some members of the church have no function. _____

c) The various parts of the body should work independently of each other. _____

d) ***1 Corinthians 12: 26*** teaches that in a church the members share each other's joys and sorrows. _____ /4

5. The 'picture', or metaphor of a human body is very suitable for a local church. Explain four ways in which a body and the church are similar.

_____

_____

_____

_____ /4

6. Link these Bible references with what they say about how the members of the body of Christ can support and help each other:

1 Thessalonians 4: 9-10	Share each other's troubles and problems.
James 5: 16	Love each other more and more.
1 Thessalonians 4: 18	Pray for one another.
Galatians 6: 2	Be kind to one another.
Ephesians 4: 32	Encourage each other.

/5

THINK: If you are a member of a local church do you value or honour the other members as God intends? Think about your actions in the past month.

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet
A12 - The Church
Study 3 - Spiritual Gifts

Leader's Comments:

1. Explain IN YOUR OWN WORDS what a spiritual gift is.

_____ /2

_____

2. Answer the following questions:

a) According to ***1 Corinthians 12: 7***, what is God's intention in giving gifts to the church? _____

_____

b) How do you think each of us can make this intention into a reality? _____ /4

_____

3. Answer TRUE or FALSE to the following statements:

a) Some Christians have been given several spiritual gifts while others have none. _____

b) Administration is one of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament. _____

c) It is our responsibility to use and develop the gift(s) which we have been given. _____

d) Spiritual gifts are given to build up the body of Christ (the Church). _____ /4

4. Read *Romans 12: 3-8* again.

a) Write a sentence to explain what our attitude should be with regard to spiritual gifts which the Lord has given to us. ***(verse 3)*** _____ /2

_____

b) What are the seven spiritual gifts mentioned in ***verses 6-8***? _____ /2

_____

c) Give an example of how a person with the following gift could use it in the church.

Serving _____

Teaching _____ /3

Giving _____

d) What should the attitude be:

i) of the person who has the gift of giving? _____

ii) of the person who has the gift of leadership? _____ /3

iii) of the person who does acts of mercy? _____

5. How would you answer a Christian who said that there was nothing for him / her to do in the church?

_____ /3

_____

6. What do you think Paul means when he tells Timothy to *"fan into flame the gift of God which is in you"? (2 Timothy 1: 6)*

_____ /2

_____

THINK: Am I seeking to discover my spiritual gift and use it in the church?

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet
A12 - The Church
Study 4 - Its Structure

Leader's Comments:

1. What three groups of members are identified in the church at Philippi? *(Philippians 1: 1)*

i) _____

ii) _____

iii) _____

/3

2. Write TRUE or FALSE after these statements:

a) Only people who are saved can be members of a local church. _____

b) Each local church will have several elders. _____

c) An elder needs to be over 50 years of age. _____

d) Elders are chosen by an interviewing panel. _____

e) Elders are easily recognised by the church because of the criteria given in the Bible. _____

f) Deacons serve the church in a practical way. _____

/6

3. Explain why elders are compared to shepherds.

_____

_____

_____

_____

/4

4. *1 Timothy 3: 1- 7* gives details about the qualifications of an elder. Answer these questions:

a) Write four adjectives from ***verse 2*** to describe an elder.

_____

b) What two things in ***verse 3*** must an elder steer clear of?

_____

c) If he is married, what does it say about his family life?

_____

d) In which verse does it say that an elder should not be someone saved a short time ago?

_____

/9

5. Read *Hebrews 13: 17*.

a) What two ways are the Christians told to treat their elders in this verse?

_____

_____

b) How is the work of an elder described in this verse?

_____

_____

/3

THINK: Think about the elders in your church. How have they 'shepherded' you? Give thanks to God for them.

Return your completed answer sheet to:

TOTAL = /25 **UNIT TOTAL = /100**

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A12 - The Church

Study 3 - Spiritual Gifts

BIBLE READING:

**Romans 12: 3-8;
1 Corinthians 12: 4-11, 28;
Ephesians 4: 11-16**

KEY VERSES:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord."

1 Corinthians 12: 4-5

In the previous study we thought about ***"the church as a body"***, with each member having a part to play so that the body functions properly. Every local church needs to do many different kinds of work for God. God gives spiritual gifts to the people in each church to help them do their spiritual work. In this study we will consider spiritual gifts and how these enable us to play our part in the body of Christ.

A spiritual gift is an ability that God gives to be used in work for God to build up the church. As the Holy Spirit works in our lives He gives us a desire to serve the Lord Jesus and His church and equips us to perform whatever service God wants of us. Spiritual gifts make it possible for us to serve God effectively.

In ***1 Corinthians 12: 4-11*** we learn several important things about spiritual gifts:

1. SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GIVEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Spiritual gifts are given to believers by the Holy Spirit. It is He who decides what each of us receives. Speaking about these gifts Paul says in ***verse 11, "All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills".***

2. EACH PERSON HAS AT LEAST ONE SPIRITUAL GIFT

Verses 7 and 11 make it clear that gifts are given ***"to each one"***. As each part of our bodies has a function to perform, so each one of us has a part to play in ***"the body of Christ" (the church)***. When we do in the church what God has fitted us to do, we are showing that God, the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. This is what is meant by ***"the manifestation of the Spirit". (verse 7)***

3. THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Many different kinds of gifts, services and activities are listed in the New Testament. ***(See Romans 12: 3-8; 1 Corinthians 12: 8-10, 28; Ephesians 4: 11-16)*** These are summarised in ***1 Peter 4: 11*** into two types:

- Gifts of speaking eg. teaching the Bible.
- Gifts of practical service eg. helping those in need.

4. SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GIVEN FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

In our human bodies, each part functions for the good of the whole. It should be the same in ***"the body of Christ"! 1 Corinthians 12: 7*** tells us the purpose for which gifts are given; they are ***"for the common good"***. Spiritual gifts are not given to an individual so that they can boast of their abilities. Gifts are given to individuals so that others can benefit and so that the church can be built up. ***(Ephesians 4: 16)***

If a spiritual gift is being used properly, its effect will be seen in the lives of others. The use of our gift is an act of service to others. ***(1 Peter 4: 10)*** If we do not use our gifts the church will suffer.

You might be thinking, how do I know what gifts I have and how do I develop them once I find them? The first thing to do is to pray and ask for God's help and guidance. You could also ask a mature Christian who knows you well to help you discover your gifts. It is also important to get involved in serving others – it is only when you are involved that you can discover the potential you have. Once you have discovered your gift it is important to use it and develop it. Paul tells Timothy to ***"fan into flame the gift of God which is in you". (2 Timothy 1: 6)***

This is the second of two units on
The Church.

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A12 - The Church

Study 4 - Its Structure

BIBLE READING:

1 Timothy 3: 1-7; 1 Peter 5: 1-5

KEY VERSE:

"We ask you brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord..."

1 Thessalonians 5: 12

Any human organisation you can think of will have a structure. For example, a school has a principal, vice-principal, heads of departments, teachers and learning assistants. The church, however, is a unique organisation in that it belongs to God. As we have learned already, it is described as ***"the church of God"*** and ***"the temple of God". (1 Corinthians 1: 2 and 3: 16)*** Therefore it is not surprising that in the New Testament we find God's instructions about how the local church is to be structured. They provide an important framework in which all church members can grow and be nurtured.

The beginning of Paul's letter to the Philippians gives us an overview of the different personnel in the local church at Philippi. It is addressed to ***"all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons". (Philippians 1: 1)*** From this we learn that:

1. All the members of the church are ***"saints"***. They are 'God's holy ones', people who are saved.

2. Some of the ***"saints"*** are ***"overseers"***, which literally means those who 'watch over' the well-being of the local church. In other Scriptures, 'overseers' are referred to as 'elders'. (See Bible Reading ***1 Peter 5: 1-5***) For the remainder of the study we will use the term 'elders'. We need to understand that there is not just one elder but several in each local church. They do not have to be old in years, but must be men who are experienced and mature in their Christian life.

3. Other saints are called "deacons". This word simply means 'servants' and denotes those who serve, usually in a more practical but vitally important way as part of the structure of a local church.

We will now look in more detail at the role of elders in the local church.

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ELDER?

This is addressed in detail in our Bible Reading – ***1 Timothy 3: 1-7***. An elder's life must be ***"above reproach" (verses 2, 7)*** and he must be able to teach the Bible. ***(verse 2)*** He must be kind and gentle with people, peace-loving and an encourager. ***(verses 2-3)*** Elders are compared to shepherds caring for a flock of sheep. ***(Acts 20: 28-31)*** Sheep need both food and protection; similarly Christians need to be fed by learning and growing in God's Word and need to be protected from false (wrong) teaching. Just as a shepherd knows his own sheep, so an elder should know the members of the church. Elders don't just tell people how they should live but ***"by being examples to the flock". (1 Peter 5: 3)***

HOW IS AN ELDER CHOSEN?

Acts 20: 28 makes it clear that elders are chosen by the Holy Spirit. Because the qualifications of an elder are made very clear in Scripture, the whole church are able to recognise God's chosen men. An elder will therefore have the trust of everyone in the church.

WHAT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ELDERS?

In our Key Verse, Paul gives instructions to the members of the church in Thessalonica to ***"respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord…. and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work". (1 Thessalonians 5: 12-13)*** We are to obey our elders ***(Hebrews 13: 17; 1 Peter 5: 5)*** and will also want to pray for them as they carry out this important God-given role on our behalf.

Let's conclude our studies by summarising what all members do in the local church. Think about how the following three points are demonstrated in the church that you belong to.

1. We worship God; that is, we love, honour and obey God above all else. As we learned previously, we can worship God through our service (***Romans 12: 1***, See A10 Study 2), and with our praise. ***(Hebrews 13:15)***

2. We love our Christian brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. (A12 Study 2)

3. We share the message of the Gospel with those who are not yet Christians.

When we belong to a church marked by these things God will be glorified and our Christian lives will be enriched as a result.

This is the second of two units on
The Church.

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