

The Church in the New Testament, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: Review and Application

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This final week is not a new lesson but a capstone, and your task as teacher is different from the previous ten. You are not introducing fresh material; you are gathering up the whole study and landing it on the heart. The doctrinal work is done. Help your class see that the ten lessons were not ten separate topics but one connected picture: the church God established at Pentecost, praying under pressure, organizing to serve, evangelizing, making disciples, sending, guarding the truth, shepherded by elders, functioning as one body, and anchored to the apostles' teaching. The question this hour asks is not "do you remember?" but "are we that church, and am I part of it?"

Keep the clock firmly in view. You have roughly forty-five minutes and ten questions, which is barely four minutes each. That means this lesson must be paced rather than overstuffed. Resist the temptation to re-teach each passage; a sentence or two of recall is enough before you turn to application. It is better to move briskly and let several people answer briefly than to bog down in Acts 2 and never reach the body of Christ. Notice too that most of these questions ask the class to evaluate our own congregation, which can go two bad directions: empty compliments, or a complaint session about people who are not in the room. Steer for the third thing, honest and hopeful self-examination that ends in someone doing something.

Above all, aim at formation. This study was never about acquiring information about the first century. It was about whether this congregation looks like the church described in the New Testament, and whether the person in the chair has been added by the Lord to the body of the saved. Keep those two questions distinct all hour, because a review like this is where they get fused. Nobody is saved by sitting in a faithful congregation, and no congregation, including this one, is the church that was established at Pentecost. Ours is one of many churches of Christ (Romans 16:16), a group of Christians in one place. Keep one more thing straight, because everything else depends on it: the universal body is made up of saved individuals, not of congregations, so this congregation is not a piece of the body of Christ. The saved people in it are. Be alert to that last point all hour. In a review of Acts 2, Acts 8, and the plan of salvation, someone in your class may realize they have never obeyed the gospel. Do not rush past that. Send your students out having taken honest stock, having given thanks for what God has built among you, and having named one specific thing they will do. Close the hour, and the study, with worship and prayer rather than with mere summary.

Question 1

Student Question:

From Acts 2:36–47, we learned how the church was established. In your own words, what is the church, and how does a person become a member of it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 1 briefly. Peter preached that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ, the crowd was cut to the heart and asked what they should do, and Peter answered: repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. About three thousand received the word and were baptized, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. The church is the body of the saved, established that day, entered by an obedient faith, and it is the Lord who does the adding.

Before they answer, make sure the class can state the two ways Scripture uses the word, because the whole quarter has assumed it and this question is where it has to be said out loud. Sometimes “church” means the whole body of the saved, every Christian everywhere without regard to time or place, as when “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Sometimes it means a single local congregation in one place and time, as when Paul wrote to “the church of God that is in Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Those are the only two senses in the New Testament. There is no third one. There is no family or network of congregations bound together by a shared human creed and organization, which would be more than one congregation and less than all the saved, and no one in Scripture is ever saved by belonging to such a thing.

Then name the two errors this distinction prevents, because both are common among people who love the New Testament pattern, and both come from fusing the local with the universal. The first is thinking that being part of a congregation with the right name on the sign is what makes a person saved. It does not. Simon believed and was baptized and was in the church at Samaria, and Peter still told him he was “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:13, 23). Ananias and Sapphira were members in good standing. The Lord adds the saved to His body when they obey the gospel, and no congregation can do that for anyone or instead of Him. The second error is saying that our congregation is the church Jesus established at Pentecost. It is not. That church is the whole body of the saved everywhere. Ours is a group of Christians in one place who began meeting whenever they began, and Paul greets many “churches of Christ” in the plural (Romans 16:16) precisely because no single one of them was the whole.

If the class grasps one thing this hour, make it this, because it holds both errors shut at once. The body of Christ is made up of individual saved people, not of congregations. Every member in Paul’s anatomy is a person, an eye or a hand or a foot, and he tells the Corinthians they are the body “and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5). So this congregation is not a piece of the body of Christ; the saved people in it are. Push the class to see why that must be true. If congregations were the units of the body, then a lost man who talked a congregation into putting him on the roll would be in Christ by a vote of men, which is

impossible. The Lord adds the saved to His body Himself, one at a time, as they obey the gospel (Acts 2:47). A congregation can grant membership in a congregation. Only the Lord grants membership in the body.

Then let the class answer in their own words, and do not settle for a definition they have memorized. Press gently on the second half of the question, because that is where it lives: how does a person become a member? Listen for whether they can say it plainly, hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized, and whether they can say why baptism belongs there without sounding defensive about it. Notice which sense of the word they are using when they answer, and be sure they can say that a person is added by the Lord to the body of the saved, and then works with a local congregation. Ask one of them to say it as they would to a neighbor.

Be alert here. This is the first question of the last hour of a study on the church, and it asks every person in the room to describe how one enters it. Someone may be realizing they have never done what those three thousand did. Do not rush. Leave a little silence, and make sure the class knows what a person would do about it today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church is the body of the saved, established at Pentecost in fulfillment of prophecy
- Scripture uses “church” in only two senses: all the saved everywhere (Ephesians 5:25), and a local congregation (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- There is no third sense; a network of congregations under a shared human creed and organization is foreign to the New Testament
- Salvation is never dependent on belonging to such an organization
- Being part of a congregation, whatever its sign says, does not save anyone; Simon was baptized and in the church and still lost (Acts 8:13, 23)
- A local congregation is not the church established at Pentecost, nor a piece of it; it is Christians in one place (Romans 16:16)
- The body of Christ is composed of individual saved people, not of congregations (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5)
- A congregation grants membership in a congregation; only the Lord grants membership in the body (Acts 2:47)
- If congregations composed the body, a lost man voted onto a roll would be in Christ, which is impossible
- Entrance is by an obedient faith: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized (Acts 2:38)
- The Lord Himself adds the saved to the body; no one joins on his own terms (Acts 2:47)
- A person is added by the Lord at salvation, and then works with a local congregation
- Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins, not because sins are already forgiven

Discussion Prompts

- Say it as you would to a neighbor: what is the church, and how does someone become part of it?
- Which sense of “church” are you using when you answer? Can you name both?
- Is it possible to be a member here and be lost? What does Simon teach us?

Question 2

Student Question:

From Acts 4:23–35, we saw a church united in prayer and generosity. How would you evaluate our own congregation’s commitment to prayer and to caring for one another’s needs?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 2 quickly. Peter and John were released with a threat, went straight to their own people, and the church lifted its voice together to God. They did not pray for safety; they prayed for boldness, and God gave it. Then Luke says they were of one heart and soul, held their possessions loosely, and there was not a needy person among them.

Turn to the evaluation, and keep it concrete. Vague answers about how we could all pray more accomplish nothing. Ask instead what our congregation actually does first when trouble comes, and whether a real material need among us would be known. The Acts 4 measure was not that they cared in the abstract; it was that nobody was in need.

Then press for one honest answer per person rather than a group verdict. Guard against two failure modes: hollow compliments, and criticism aimed at people who are not present. The useful question is not “how is our congregation doing?” but “what am I supplying, and what am I not?”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Corporate prayer is the church’s first response to trouble, not its last resort (Acts 4:24)
- They prayed for boldness rather than safety; faithfulness is the aim of prayer under pressure
- Sharing was voluntary and love-driven, not communal ownership (Acts 5:4; 2 Corinthians 9:7)
- The measure of their generosity was that no one among them was in need

Discussion Prompts

- When trouble comes to us, what do we actually do first?
- If someone here had a real material need, would we know?
- What are you personally supplying to this congregation’s prayer and care?

Question 3

Student Question:

From Acts 6:1–7, we learned about the importance of service and shared leadership. How well does our congregation involve its members in meaningful service, and what could be improved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 3 briefly. The Hellenistic widows were being overlooked, the apostles refused both to ignore the problem and to solve it by doing everything themselves, the congregation chose seven men of good repute full of the Spirit and wisdom, and the apostles appointed them. The result was that the word of God increased and the disciples multiplied.

Turn the class to the two halves of the question, because both matter. First, are people serving? Ask how many members have real work rather than nominal membership, and whether anyone here has never been asked. Second, is anyone being overlooked? Every congregation has a seam, and Acts 6 says the health of a church is proved by what it does the moment someone says so.

Then press for the personal version, because this question can stay comfortably institutional. The lesson said a Christian can fail God by doing good work that was never his, and can also fail by waiting for work that feels important enough. Ask each person which of those is their temptation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Problems are to be named and addressed, not managed or buried (Acts 6:1-2)
- God sets the qualifications; the congregation recognizes; those with authority appoint (Acts 6:3, 6)
- No task in the church is so practical that character does not matter
- Shared, orderly service freed the word to spread (Acts 6:7)

Discussion Prompts

- Who here has never been asked to do anything? What does that say about us?
- Where is our seam, the place someone could quietly be overlooked?
- Are you doing work that was never yours, or waiting for work that feels important enough?

Question 4

Student Question:

From Acts 8:26–40, Philip's example taught us about personal evangelism and the centrality of baptism. Are you personally prepared to share the gospel and explain the necessity of baptism to someone who asks?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 4 quickly. Philip left a citywide work for one man on a desert road, listened before he spoke, asked a question rather than making a speech, began with the Scripture the man was already reading, and told him the good news about Jesus. The eunuch immediately asked what prevented him from being baptized, was baptized on the spot, and went on his way rejoicing.

This question is personal, so do not let the class answer it institutionally. The honest answer for many will be no, and that is worth admitting out loud. Ask them what specifically stops them: not knowing where to start, fear of the question they cannot answer, or simply never having tried. Then ask what they would actually say, not the outline but the content, and let someone attempt it in front of the class.

Remember Philip was not an apostle; he was a man chosen to distribute food to widows. That removes the excuse of qualification. The eunuch's question is still the best test of our teaching: if someone heard you present the gospel, would they end up asking what prevents them from being baptized?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Evangelism begins with listening, asking, and starting where the person actually is
- The eunuch's question proves Philip taught baptism as part of preaching Jesus (Acts 8:35-36)
- The joy came after obedience, not before it (Acts 8:39)
- Philip was not an apostle; no office was required, only Scripture and willingness

Discussion Prompts

- If someone asked you today what they must do to be saved, what would you actually say?
- What specifically stops you from having that conversation?
- Would someone who heard you present the gospel end up asking the eunuch's question?

Question 5

Student Question:

From Acts 11:19-26, we learned about the church at Antioch and the importance of discipleship. What steps is our congregation taking to grow disciples, not just members, and how can you contribute?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 5 briefly. Ordinary Christians scattered by persecution preached where they landed, some crossed the line and spoke to Greeks, and the hand of the Lord was with them. Jerusalem sent Barnabas, who saw the grace of God, urged them to remain faithful with steadfast purpose, went to Tarsus to find Saul, and the two of them taught the church for a whole year. It was there that disciples were first called Christians.

Focus the class on the distinction that carried that lesson: converts versus disciples. Antioch already had believers before Barnabas arrived, and he concluded they needed a year of teaching anyway. Ask what our congregation does with someone after they are baptized, and whether it amounts to anything like a year of Barnabas and Saul.

Then make it personal in two directions, because the lesson had both. Who invested in you? And who is your Saul, the person sitting unused in Tarsus that somebody needs to go and get? Barnabas gave away his own prominence to develop a man who would surpass him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Making disciples is teaching them to observe all Christ commanded, not gathering converts (Matthew 28:19-20)
- Sustained, unglamorous teaching is what built the church that later sent Paul
- Barnabas urged them to remain, which assumes a Christian can fall away (Acts 11:23)
- The name Christian points to Christ alone, not to men or movements (1 Peter 4:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What happens to someone here after they are baptized?
- Who invested in your growth, and whom are you investing in now?
- Who is your Saul, sitting in Tarsus, waiting for someone to come get them?

Question 6

Student Question:

From Acts 13:1-12, we saw the church at Antioch send Barnabas and Saul on mission. How does our congregation support gospel work beyond our own walls, and is there more you could do?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 6 quickly. While the church was worshiping the Lord and fasting, God asked for two of its five leaders, including its most beloved man. The church fasted, prayed, laid hands on them, and sent them off, and Luke says both that the church sent them and that the Holy Spirit sent them. On Cyprus the proconsul believed, astonished not at the miracle but at the teaching of the Lord.

Press the evaluation past the budget. Supporting mission work is easy to reduce to a line item we are glad to fund. The Antioch question is sharper: would we send our best, and does our support cost us anything? A church that sends only what it will not miss has not really sent.

Then let the class name something specific. Praying for a worker by name, writing to one, giving beyond habit, going. And remember what persuaded Sergius Paulus, because it applies here: the teaching is enough. No one needs a spectacle to reach their neighbor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Mission begins in worship, not in ambition (Acts 13:2)
- The church sent and the Spirit sent; God works through His people, not around them (Acts 13:3-4)
- Supporting gospel workers is partnership and an offering to God, not patronage (Philippians 1:5; 4:18)
- The teaching, not the miracle, produced faith (Acts 13:12)

Discussion Prompts

- Would we send our two best people? What reasons would we give for keeping them?
- Has our support of gospel work cost us anything?
- Name one specific thing you could do this month for a worker beyond our walls.

Question 7

Student Question:

From Acts 15:1-21, we learned how the early church resolved doctrinal questions. When disagreements arise in our congregation, are they handled with Scripture, patience, and respect, or with politics and emotion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 7 briefly. Men taught that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved, Paul and Barnabas contended sharply against it, the matter was taken to the apostles and elders in the open, everyone was heard, the assembly fell silent and listened, and James settled it by appealing to Scripture. The church refused to add the law of Moses to the gospel, and it refused to split.

Turn to the evaluation and be specific rather than general. Ask which step of that process we skip: bringing it into the open, letting the other side speak, falling silent, or refusing to settle anything until Scripture has the last word. Almost every congregational wound comes from skipping one of those.

Then press the two-sided personal question the lesson raised. Some fight about anything and call it faithfulness; some fight about nothing and call it love. Ask each person which one they are, and what it has cost the people around them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Nothing may be added to the gospel as necessary for salvation (Galatians 1:6-9; 5:2-4)
- Contending for the faith is commanded; quarreling is condemned (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 2:23-24)
- Experience raised the question; Scripture settled it (Acts 15:15-18)

- Insisting on the truth produced real unity rather than destroying it

Discussion Prompts

- When we disagree here, which step of the Acts 15 process do we skip?
- Do you fight about everything and call it faithfulness, or nothing and call it love?
- Are we willing to let Scripture overrule what we have always assumed?

Question 8

Student Question:

From Acts 20:17–38, Paul charged the Ephesian elders to shepherd and protect the flock. How can you better support and encourage the shepherds of a congregation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 8 quickly. Paul, never to see these men again, grounded his charge in a life they had watched: humility, tears, hard work, and no shrinking from the whole counsel of God. He told them the Holy Spirit had made them overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood, warned that wolves would come from outside and from among themselves, and commended them to God and to the word of His grace.

Notice that this question asks what the class can do, not what the elders should do, and hold them to that. The lesson made a point worth repeating here: alertness is invisible when it succeeds and blamed when it fails. Nobody thanks a shepherd for the crisis that never happened. These men carry something that cost God His own blood, and they usually carry it without applause.

Then get specific. Praying for them by name and by burden. Telling them something good rather than only something wrong. Not making them chase you. And the question Hebrews 13:17 puts to every member: when they give an account for your soul, will they do it with joy or with groaning? That answer is largely ours to decide.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Elders, overseers, and shepherds are three terms for one group of men in one congregation (Acts 20:17, 28)
- The Holy Spirit made them overseers; the office and qualifications come from God (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)
- They shepherd a church obtained with God's own blood
- Members will be accounted for and should make that accounting a joy (Hebrews 13:17)

Discussion Prompts

- Do you know our shepherds well enough to pray for them by name and by burden?

- When did you last tell one of them something good rather than something wrong?
- When they give an account for your soul, will it be with joy or with groaning?

Question 9

Student Question:

From 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, we were reminded that the church is one body with many members. Are there members of our congregation who may feel overlooked or undervalued? What can you do about that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Recall Lesson 9 briefly. Paul answered a divided, competitive church with an anatomy lesson. All were baptized into one body. God arranged each member as He chose. The foot cannot resign, the eye cannot dismiss anyone, the parts that seem weaker are indispensable, and God Himself gives greater honor to the part that lacked it. You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Push the class to answer the question with names rather than categories, at least in their own minds. Who here has never been thanked? Whose absence has quietly become normal? The seemingly weaker members are usually the ones with no platform, and Paul says the congregation cannot do without them.

Then close with the two-sided question from that lesson, because nearly everyone is one or the other: are you the foot who has quietly decided he does not belong, or the eye who has quietly decided he does not need someone? And honoring is an action, not a feeling. Ask each person to name one specific thing, this week, toward one specific person.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- All Christians were baptized into one body; membership is God's doing (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- God arranged each member deliberately, as He chose (1 Corinthians 12:18)
- The parts that seem weaker are indispensable, and God honors the part that lacked it (1 Corinthians 12:22–24)
- If one member suffers, all suffer; the diagnostic is not “do we care?” but “would we know?”

Discussion Prompts

- Who here has never been thanked? Whose absence has become normal?
- Are you the foot who decided he does not belong, or the eye who decided he does not need someone?
- Name one specific thing you will do this week for one specific person.

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking at everything we have studied together, what is the most important lesson you are taking away, and what specific change will you make in your own life as a result?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the whole study in a few sentences and then get out of the way. The church did not evolve, and men did not invent it. God established it at Pentecost, purchased it with the blood of His Son, adds the saved to it Himself, and told us in the apostles' teaching what it is and how it lives. Everything the class studied, the prayer, the service, the evangelism, the discipling, the sending, the doctrinal courage, the shepherding, the body, was one picture of that.

Now let the class answer, and protect the second half of the question. "What I am taking away" is easy and safe; "what specific change will you make" is the whole point. Do not accept resolutions to be more faithful in general. Press for something with a name, a day, or a person attached to it, and let several people say theirs out loud.

Then close the study the way it should close: not with a summary but with worship and prayer. And leave the room with the question the whole quarter has been asking, gently and without pressure. The New Testament describes what the church is. Would anyone recognize us from the description, and are you part of it?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church is God's creation, purchased by the blood of Christ and governed by His word
- Its identity, worship, and mission are defined by Scripture, not by culture or preference
- We seek to restore the New Testament pattern rather than reinvent the church for the age
- The final question is not whether we understand the church but whether we are part of it

Discussion Prompts

- What one specific change will you make, with a day or a person attached to it?
- Would anyone recognize us from the New Testament's description of the church?
- Has the Lord added you to His church? If not, what are you waiting for?