

LESSON 4 Being Part of God's Church

What does the past mean to me? What does the meaning of the church matter to me? In this lesson we will look at the church and at you. This is a very personal lesson. It might be the most important part of this book. Many people have problems because they do not know the truth presented in this lesson. The church has many troubles when it does not understand the truth.

Probably I have never met you, and you have never seen me. But if you have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, then we are both members of the church. By God's grace, someday we will meet. We will be together in heaven! In heaven we will praise God together for His grace in Christ. We will understand more completely the nature of His church.

The Plan

- A. People's Responsibility
- B. God's Work in Salvation
- C. Names for God's People

The Goals

1. List three things we must do to become part of God's church.
2. Explain what God does to make people a part of His church.
3. Identify biblical terms by which believers are referred.

A. PEOPLE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Goal 1. List three things we must do to become part of God's church.

Repentance

We have seen some of the wonderful things God will do for His church. It would be terrible to be left out. What must you do to be part of God's church?

First, the Bible tells us that we must repent. To repent means "to change your mind, your way of thinking, and your attitude." In repenting, a person examines his or her past, is remorseful for past errors, and decides to change. Repentance is moving "self" from the center and giving that place to God. Paul described it this way: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7).

Jesus told a wonderful story about a young man who left his father and wasted his money and his life. Then he repented and returned to his father. He felt sorry for what he had done and decided to change his life. That is true repentance (Luke 15:11–32).

Application

1 Read each of the passages below. Write the main topic of each of these Scriptures.

a) Matthew 3:2

b) Matthew 4:17

c) Acts 2:38

2 Write the definition of the word *repent* in your own words.

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Conversion

The word *conversion* is found 40 times in the New Testament. It means “the act of turning.” It is used many times in the book of Acts. These words are usually followed by “to the Lord” or “to God” (Acts 9:35; 11:21; 15:19). A person must turn *from* the old (repentance) and *towards* the new (conversion). The repentant person must give himself or herself to God.

This turning is both away from something and towards something else. Paul told the church at Thessalonica of the testimony that the Thessalonian believers had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Application

3 Answer the following questions:

a) What does conversion mean?

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b) From what must unbelievers turn away?

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c) To whom must they turn?

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Belief

To believe in means “to put trust in” or “to count on.” The Bible says, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Faith and belief are very similar in meaning.

To have belief in Christ is to meet Him, to love Him, to trust Him, to obey Him, and to remain faithful to Him. Faith is *active* trust in God. Our faith is shown by our actions.

Application

4 A jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Write your answer to this question. Then, read Acts 16:30–31 to find the answer given.

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5 Define *belief* in your own words.

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Repentance, conversion, and belief are closely related. They are three parts of the same experience. Have you truly repented, been converted, and do you have faith (belief) in Christ? If you have not done so, accept Christ by faith now. This is the only way into God's church.

B. GOD'S WORK IN SALVATION

So far in this lesson, we have looked at people's part in coming to God. Yet we cannot do our part without God's help. God brings people into the church. Luke said of the church, “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

The New Birth

Goal 2. Explain what God does to make people a part of His church.

It is not by physical birth that people become Christians. It is by the **new birth**. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus made clear the need for being born again. (See John 3:3–7.) Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Paul repeated the same truth, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50).

Yes, God wants you to be born again. He wants you to have a new start. The Bible calls this *regeneration*. Just as you were born into a human family, you must be born spiritually into God’s family.

Application

6 What happens when the new birth occurs in a person’s life?

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The New Nature

You were born with a certain nature. When you are born again, you get a new nature—God’s nature. Peter spoke of the believer as one who “may participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Paul explained, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Bible teaches that there are two evidences of being born again. The first evidence is the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Romans 8:16). The second is the *fruit of righteousness* which is produced in the believer’s life. Those who are born of the Spirit should bring forth fruit of the Spirit. (See Galatians 5:22–23 for a list of the fruit of the Spirit.)

Application

7 Read Matthew 12:33–35 and explain the new nature

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- 8** Examine your life and answer these questions with *yes* or *no*.
- a)** Do you have the witness of the Holy Spirit in your heart?
- b)** Can people see the fruit of the Spirit in your life?
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If you answered *no* to these questions, perhaps you should re-examine your life to be sure that you have repented, turned from sin, and are trusting completely in God.

C. NAMES FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Goal 3. Identify biblical terms by which believers are referred.

Many people call themselves Christians. Some of these people, however, have not had the spiritual experience we have studied. They are not really Christians even if they associate with the visible church. They are not members of God's true church and are "unconverted" people.

Unconverted people who associate with the visible church cannot be called by any of the names given in the Bible to members of the true church. We will look at only four of these names. But our list could be much longer.

Disciples

Throughout the book of Acts, believers are called *disciples*. (See Acts 6:1–2; 9:1; 11:26; 14:21–22; 18:27; and 19:9.) Jesus called His followers disciples. A disciple is a learner who adopts the doctrine of his master. In the gospels, the disciples stayed close to the Master. They bound themselves to obey Christ.

Unconverted people do not obey Christ and, therefore, are not called disciples. Such people should not be called Christians, because they are not true Christians.

Saint

The New Testament often calls church members *saints*. (See Acts 9:13; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 13:13; Ephesians 1:1; and Colossians 1:12.) Notice that saints are on earth as well as in heaven. Saints are those separated unto God. Unconverted people are not saints because they have not been set apart for God.

Brethren

The term *brethren* is the most common name for believers in the New Testament. This word shows the ties between believers within the church. The church is God's family. Believers have been born into God's family by the new birth. Believers are Christ's brethren (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11–12, 17 KJV).

Unconverted people are not Christ's brethren. They are not, therefore, part of God's church.

Christians

As we have seen, believers were not at first called *Christians*. They were called disciples, saints, or brethren. The term *Christian* was first used to mock believers. But it refers to those that belong to Him and are like Christ (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and 1 Peter 4:16). The term *Christian* should be used only for those who have been born again and have Christ's nature.

The early believers were called by many names. Each name, however, is to be used only for born-again people in the church. They should not be used for those who associate with a visible church organization but have not been born again.

Application

9 We have studied four Bible terms which describe a believer. List them here.

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10 From the Bible terms that describe a believer, select one to fit each of the following definitions.

a) A learner who is very close to his master:

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b) A term used to mock believers because they acted like Christ:

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c) Means "separated to God":

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d) Shows that all believers are part of God's family:

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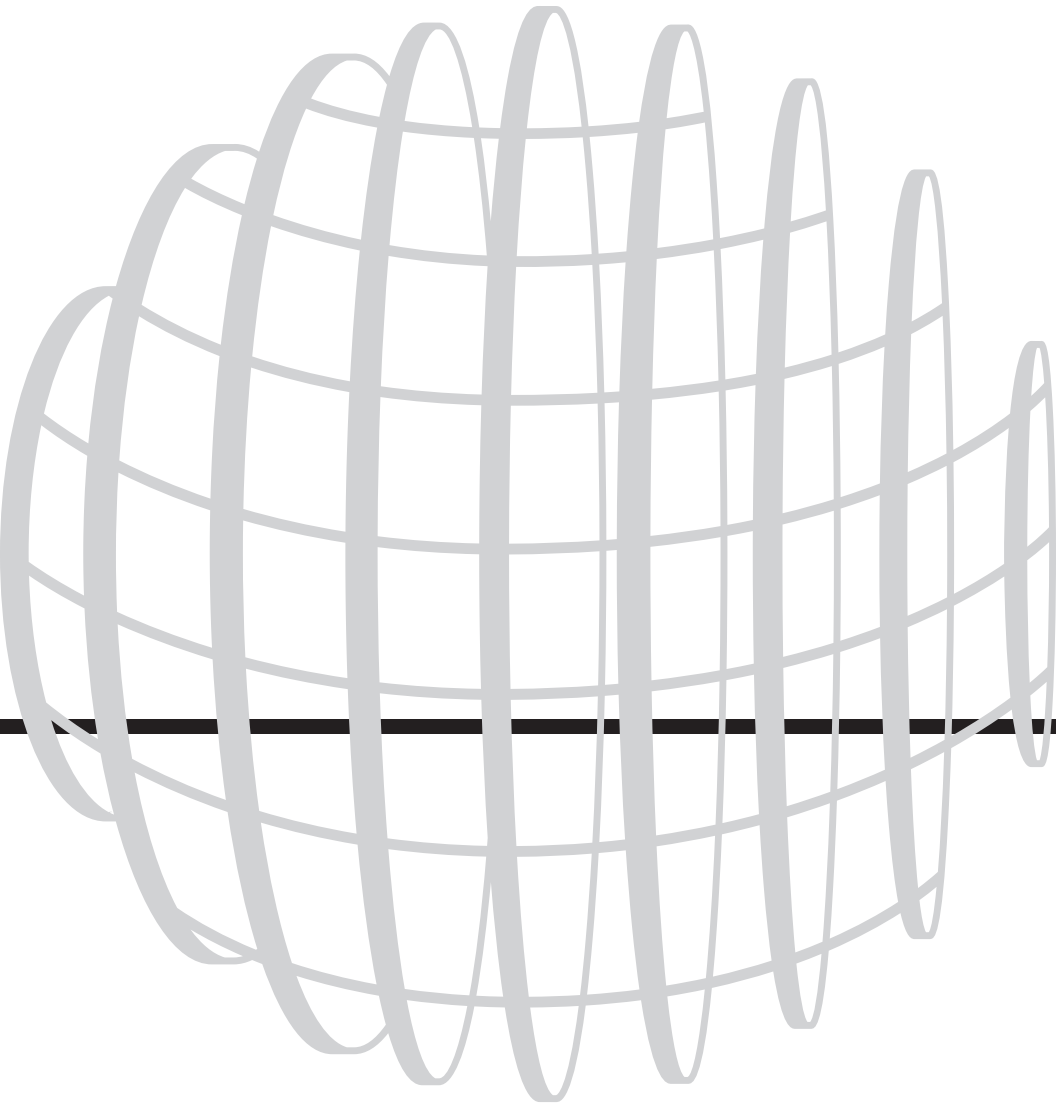


I trust that you have had the experience of being born again (believing in Jesus as your Lord and Savior), and that you are part of God's church. This experience is the most important thing in your life. You might be a church member or might be called a Christian. But you *must* be born again to be part of God's church. Do it right now!

Check Your Answers

- 10 a)** Disciple
b) Christian
c) Saint
d) Brethren
- 1 a)** Repentance
b) Repentance
c) Repentance
- 9** Disciples, saints, brethren, Christians
- 2** Your own words, but it should include the idea of feeling sorry and wanting to change.
- 8** Your answer. If your answer is no, or if you are not sure, ask God to give you the new nature.
- 3 a)** The act of turning
b) From idols, sin, etc
c) God
- 7** People, like trees, give fruit according to their nature. At the new birth, believers get a new nature.
- 4** ““Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.””
- 6** He or she is born into God’s family. This is a spiritual birth.
- 5** Your own words, but it should include the ideas of trust in, rely upon.

Now that you have completed the first unit, you are ready to answer the questions in your Unit Report for Unit One. Review the previous lessons, then follow the instructions in your Unit Report Directions for filling out the answer sheet. Send your answer sheet to the address given at the top of the second page of this book.



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Unit

Lessons

- 5** The Church Body
- 6** What the Church Does for Itself
- 7** The Church's Impact on the World
- 8** What the Church Does for God