

Empower
Session 5

How God Sees The Church (Part 1)

Updated: 10/24/09

How God Sees the Church

The purpose of this lesson is to help our people understand how God sees the church.

Many of us grew up in church and have ideas on what the church is all about. In this section, we are going to lay aside our pre-conceived ideas and look deeply into what the Bible has to say about the church.

When we see what was in God's heart as He created the church

- It will be life changing
- It will change our motive and attitudes
- It will change the priorities in our lives.

There are two basic aspects in which the word "church" is used in the Bible.

1. The Universal Church is all of God's people, every generation, in every country. It's described in:

- **EPHESIANS 3:10** ... "all of God's family"
- **HEBREWS 12:23** ... "the firstborn who are registered in heaven."

2. The second usage of "church" is of the Local Church - various groups of believers meeting in different places, cities or homes. This is the emphasis in:

- **ACTS 14:23** ... "when they had appointed elders in every church ..."
- **I CORINTHIANS 4:17** ... "as I teach everywhere in every church ..."
- **COLOSINIANS 4:15** ... "Greet Nymphas and the church that is in his house."

As far as we can tell, there were only these two categories in which the word "church" is used in the Bible.

HOW GOD SEES THE CHURCH — PART 1

When you discover What the church really is — it will change the motives, attitudes and priorities of your life.

The Bible speaks of the church in two aspects. We have to distinguish in which sense the word is being used.

1. The Universal Church

Ephesians 3:10 — “all of His (God’s) family”

Hebrews 12:23 — “all those registered in Heaven”

2. The Local Church

Acts 14:23 — “appointed elders in every church”

I Corinthians 4:17 — “What I teach in all the churches”

Colossians 4:15 — “to Nympha and the church in her house”

On The Other Hand The Denominational Church
is a non-Biblical distinction

There were multiple congregations in various cities, but they all viewed themselves as the Church of Jesus Christ and had no other distinctions than that.

Someday God is going to answer Jesus’ prayer in **John 17:21**, and produce a oneness in the spirit which will lift all true believers up above the present walls of separation so that we may truly be one!

I pray... for those You have given me. Protect them by the power of Your Name so that they may be one as we are one...that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. — John 17:9, 11& 21

FIVE KEY WORD-ACTION PICTURES SHOW US HOW GOD VIEWS THE CHURCH

On the other hand, today there is a third and non-biblical usage of the word “church” - the **DENOMINATIONAL** church.

- Saint Paul never dreamed there would be a Baptist Church, a Lutheran Church, a Catholic Church, a Presbyterian Church, a Methodist Church, on various streets of the city.
- In Ephesus, there were many congregations meeting in different homes or halls, but they were all the church of Jesus Christ.
- This non-biblical development is one reason for much of the competition and rivalry amongst churches.
- There is however, a Law of Existing Ordinances. Denominations have existed for many generations. We can't just necessarily throw out centuries of church history.
- Personally, we happen to be “baptists” by certain connections, as well as by heritage. But first and foremost, we’re Christians.
- When the baptism with the Holy Spirit began to occur in our church back in the USA, there were some members of our Baptist church who didn't like it. So there was division. One deacon tried to understand; we opened the Bible and showed him what it said. One day, he shook his head and said, "I don't care if it's in the Bible, it isn't Baptist!"

God's purpose to so fill our hearts with Himself that the name on the building, our tradition, and even a variety of beliefs, won't predominate to the point of separation. We should be one Body all together. Jesus prayed for this in John 17:9, 11-21. Someday, God is going to answer Jesus' prayer in **JOHN 17:21**.

The intention of the Holy Spirit is that we might rise above the walls that have divided us and consider ourselves part of one great family with Christians from other denominations.

The church is an organism, not an organization. It's a body, a living body, not a structure or association. When we speak about Jesus making the church "one", we are not speaking about the church being one large organization. We won't all be under one set of world-wide leaders. Satan will create this as he develops an “apostate church” which will persecute those of us who are of the “living” body of Christ.

God's way is that all who truly worship Christ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, will sense that they are brothers and sisters together; that they are all parts of the one church in this community. Then we won't be so concerned about denominational labels.

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FIVE KEY WORD-ACTION PICTURES SHOW US HOW GOD VIEWS THE CHURCH

There are five (5) key “word-action pictures” in the Bible which we will explore to see how God truly views the church:

- God's Special People
- God's Dwelling Place
- God's Family
- Christ's Body
- Christ's Bride

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FIVE KEY WORD-ACTION PICTURES SHOW US HOW GOD VIEWS THE CHURCH

1. The church is composed of GOD'S SPECIAL PEOPLE

- First and foremost, the church is basically not a building, not a way of worship, not a denomination or an organizational structure to which we belong - BUT THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE.
- All the rest has its place, but must never be more important than reaching, growing, and maturing God's people. People's needs must come first.
- There are two distinct characteristics about God's Special People

First, they are a **CHOSEN** people. 1 Peter 2:9-10 "Before, they weren't His people, but now they are."

- The Greek word for "church" is "**EKKLESIA**" - the "called out ones" - called out from the rest of mankind to be God's (mention the pamphlet they will read in their manuals).
- Jesus said everyone is not a child of God! (John 8:44)
- It is only those who have responded to His Son Jesus and have become His followers - who love, obey, and honor God; who are His spiritual children. The rest are not.
- God chose Abraham, who responded to God's call in the Old Testament. In the same way, God has chosen those who have responded to Jesus as His special people today.
- It must be clear that God has not chosen us because we are so much better than others. We are not God's **SPECIAL FAVORITES**, but rather we are chosen to be God's **REPRESENTATIVES**. We are people who demonstrate to the rest of the world what it is like to be God's special people.
- So, there is a **DOUBLE** choosing involved in becoming God's special people. It is not enough just for God to choose us, but we also must choose Him to be our God. We only become His Special People when we also have made our choice.
- If you take the steps that lead you to say, "Yes Lord, I'll be your special person, different from all the rest," then you qualify to be the Church. Otherwise, you could attend church all your life and yet not ever belong to the real church.

I. GOD’S SPECIAL PEOPLE

The Church is “PEOPLE”

- not buildings
- not liturgy
- not structure
- not tradition

...but people

— A Chosen people

“But you are the chosen race... God’s own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you from the darkness into His own marvelous light. At one time you were not God’s people, but now you are His people; at one time you did not know God’s mercy, but now you have received His mercy.” — 1 Peter 2:9-10

“Church” = “Ekklesia” — the “called-out ones”

The world would love you if you belonged to it, but you don’t for I chose you to come out of the world. — John 15:19

The church is a company of people who have allowed their life to come under the call of God. Illustration: Abraham

Not God’s Special Favorites

but rather, God’s Representatives

So, it is a Double choosing

A Separated people — II Corinthians 6: 14-17

v. 14 two definite groups

Don’t be teamed with those who do not love the Lord for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness.

Along with being a Chosen people, we see that the Church is a **SEPERATED** people.

- Once we have responded to God's choice of us, then some serious implications follow. Paul says to the Corinthians (II Cor. 6:14-17) that we are then separated to God. Paul contrasts the two distinct groups of people.
 - o The people of God and the people of sin
 - o Believers and non-believers
 - o Light and darkness
 - o Righteous and lawless

- If we are the people of God, the people of light and righteousness, then we need to take seriously this instruction in this passage regarding our relationships with the other group.

26 F.L.C. — EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle

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Don’t be teamed with those who do not love the Lord for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness.

- Verse 15 instructs us, "Don't be unequally yoked with these other people." The church in India may be better at this than we are in America. Areas where this principle is applied include:
 - Marriage ... Christians are not to marry non-Christians.
 - Other partnerships ... business and associations. Our goals would probably be far apart. Many times, what a Christian feels God wants him to do seems to be foolishness to a non-Christian.
 - And Closest Friends ... we should not be totally removed from the world's people. There are people at work, in the market, in our neighborhoods, with whom we should associate in a normal, friendly, loving way. But those whom we are closest to, those with whom we spend most of our time, those who have the biggest influence on our lives, they need to be God's people so we can grow together with them in our love and service to Christ.
- When Paul wrote to Timothy in II Tim. 2:22, he instructed him to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."
- Verse 16 - what a privilege! "For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, 'I will dwell with them, and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be My people.'" How can we possibly take this kind of relationship with God and bring someone into it who doesn't have the same relationship?
- Verse 17 - So God's command is very clear, "'Therefore, come out from among them and be separate,' says the Lord. 'Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you.'"
- Now there are two matters which need to be addressed here:
 - The "Spiritual Adultery" of God's people. God hates it when those who claim to be His can't or won't be different from the world's people around them. God views this behavior as unfaithfulness.
 - The tragic misuse of this verse down through the centuries as Christians have used it against other Christians, separating themselves, not from pagans and unbelievers, but from other Christians who are not just like them, because they do not have all of the same doctrines, standards or practices. This verse is about separating yourself unto God from those who do not have a living relationship with Jesus, not from other believers who differ from you in certain ways.

v.15 partnerships

And what harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a Christian be a partner with one who doesn't believe ?

v. 16 our special distinction

And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For you are God's temple, the home of the living God, and God has said of you "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people."

v. 17 God's clear command

That is why the Lord has said, "Leave them; separate yourselves from them; don't touch their filthy things and I will welcome you."

II. GOD'S DWELLING PLACE – A spiritual building

The church becomes the very dwelling place of God on this earth

I Corinthians 3:9 — We are God's **Building**

I Peter 2:4-5 — We are **Living Stones** for God's building.

"We who believe are carefully joined together with Christ as parts of a beautiful, constantly growing temple for God." — Ephesians 2:20

A spiritual building in which God dwells here on earth today; where His glory is manifested, where praise and worship rise up to Him.

And now you have become living building-stones for God's use in building His house. — I Peter 2:5

III. GOD'S FAMILY

The church is the household of God — a family

I Timothy 3:15 "...the household of God, which is the church..."
Galatians 6: 10 "...those who belong to the Christian household."
Ephesians 2:19 "...you are members of God's very own family...
with every other Christian."

A startling statement: Many Sunday worship attenders have never found the church.

2. The second word action picture that God uses to describe His church is as GOD'S DWELLING PLACE, a spiritual building.

- The bible tells us that the church has now become the dwelling place of God on earth.

We are Gods **BUILDING** (I Cor. 3:9)

- In John 4:14, Jesus told the woman at the well that the day would come when it wouldn't matter where we worship God, but that we would worship Him "in spirit and in truth."
- We have our own church buildings, of course. But the true place where God dwells on earth today is in the hearts of His people.

We are **LIVING STONES** in His building (I Peter 2:4-5) He is building us into a spiritual house.

- The Holy Spirit is carefully joining us together into that dwelling place of God.
- The difference between a true church and a congregation is the difference between a pile of bricks and a building. It doesn't become a building until skilled masons, brick by brick, put it together according to a pattern or blueprint. It doesn't become a true church until the Holy Spirit puts it together brick by brick, believer by believer, according to God's plan or blueprint.
- Ephesians 2:21 says that we are being, "fitted together, growing into a temple for the Lord."
- We are God's temple (I Cor. 6:19). When we gather as His temple, we become a powerful expression of God's presence on the earth.

3. The third action picture: the CHURCH IS GOD'S FAMILY

- The church is the "household of God" as referred to in the I Timothy, Galatians 6, and Ephesians 2 passages.

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A startling statement: Many Sunday worship attenders have never found the church.

- A startling statement: “Some Sunday attendees at a church service have never truly found the church at all.”

- If we separate ourselves from other Christians, the fire of our Christian witness will not burn as brightly, and the very embers of our life could be extinguished.
 - Illustration: taking a burning ember out of the fire

- This whole concept is expressed in the Greek word "**KOINONIA**", which is translated in the scriptures most often as, "fellowship". A good definition of Koinonia is "**FELLOWS TOGETHER IN THE SAME SHIP.**"

- I John 1:3 - God has invited us into this wonderful fellowship with His Son.

- I John 1:7 - “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin.”

- So "koinonia" is another understanding of how God sees the church. It's not enough to be His house or even His "called out ones". God wants us to be a Family on this earth, who love and need each other like no one else in the world does.

- The church is to be a band of brother and sisters. If you don't care much for your spiritual family, then something is very much out of order. The Holy Spirit will create amongst us a desire to be together.

- Actually, the Holy Spirit is working through us to form a new **COMMUNITY.**

Illustration: The ember and the fire

This whole family concept is expressed in the Greek word “Koinonia”

which is most often translated, “Fellowship.”

I John 1:3 and 7

1 Corinthians 1:19

Fellowship is: “Fellows together in the same ship”

We are telling you what we have actually seen and heard; so that you may share in the fellowship we have with the Father and Jesus Christ His Son — I John 1:3

But if we are living in the light of God’s presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin. — I John 1:7

Unless the church is a “band of brothers” it is not a true church at all. Jesus said that a life laying-down-love would be the real mark of His church — people caring for, watching over, finding great joy and support in one another.

Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are My disciples.

— John 13:35

The Holy Spirit intends to create such a relational fellowship that these spiritual family members cannot stand to be apart!

Actually a Community is being formed.

Ralph Martin interprets a community for us:

“For Christians, community can be described as a family relationship. Coming into community means passing from relationships based primarily on my convenience or my need, to relationships that are based on commitment: whether it’s convenient or not, whether I need you or not, I commit myself to be a brother or sister to you. Living together under one roof or putting our salaries and material possessions in common are not the essential aspects of community life. It’s the relationship of brothers and sisters that is the core.”

- The world around us stresses our being independent from one another.
- Christ's kingdom emphasized our "one anotherness". In your book is a list of the 30 "one anothers" found in scripture - ways to love and serve one another.
- READ SOME of the "One Anothers"
- Notice that only a few of these actions can take place on Sunday morning. Many of them will take place in our everyday life together outside the church "building" or services.
- Read the final paragraph in the lesson notes beginning, "God's goal ..."

Our society stresses — independence

Christ's Kingdom emphasizes — One-anotherness

See: The "30 one anothers" in the New Testament

God's goal for His Church is to bring His people out of an independent, self-centered lifestyle into a place where they are truly family, to a place where within the fellowship of the Holy Spirit they begin to live for each other instead of for themselves.

30 “ONE ANOTHERS” — Ways To Serve One Another

“Fellowship with one another”	I John 1:7
“Love one another” John	13:34-35
“Members of one another” (Depend)	Romans 12:5*
“Devoted to one another”	Romans 12:10*
“Outdo one another in showing honor”	Romans 12:10
“Rejoice with one another”	Romans 12:15
“Weep with one another”	Romans 12:15
“Same mind toward one another”	Romans 12: 16 *
“Not judge one another”	Romans 14:13 *
“Accept one another”	Romans 15:7 *
“Counsel one another”	Romans 15:14 Amp.
“Greet one another”	Romans 16:16
“Wait for one another”	I Corinthians 11:33
“Care for one another”	I Corinthians 12:25
“Serve one another”	Galatians 5:13 #
“Bear one another’s burdens”	Galatians 6:2
“Be kind to one another”	Ephesians 4:32
“Forgive one another”	Ephesians 4:32
“Submit to one another”	Ephesians 5:21
“Bearing with one another”	Colossians 3:13 *
“Encourage one another”	I Thessalonians 5:11
“Build up one another”	I Thessalonians 5:11 *
“Stir up one another”	Hebrews 10:24
“Be hospitable to one another”	I Peter 4:9 *
“Minister gifts to one another”	I Peter 4:10
“Clothed with humility to one another”	I Peter 5:5
“Not speak evil against one another”	James 4:11
“Not grumble against one another”	James 5:9
“Confess faults to one another”	James 5:16
“Pray for one another”	James 5:16

*New American Standard Version

#King James Version

All others Revised Standard Version

CRURCH – Ekklesia

The Greek New Testament has only one word translated *church*. Its original meaning is clear and simple, despite the confusing secondary meanings given to it over the centuries. Although it is not obvious, the word translated *church* is related to our word *call*.

Let's look at it this way: Reduce *call* to a phonetic form and we have *kal*. This in fact is the Greek root for call. the Greek verb is *kal-eo*, to call. Add *ek*, like the Latin *ex*, for "out," and we have *ek-kal-esia* or "called out ones." The first "a" is elided in normal speech and writing, so we have *ekklesia*, "a group of called out or chosen people."

Ekklesia occurs 115 times in the New Testament and is translated *assembly* three times and *church* 112 times. There are several clear deductions from this.

1. PEOPLE

Ekklesia refers to people; it's a collective term meaning a group of people.

2. NOT A BUILDING

The church is never a building. No record exists in the Bible or even in the first two centuries of the Christian era that a building was called a church. Indeed, we don't read that Christians ever met then in places especially built for Christian meetings or services.

3. KOINONIA—NOT A PREACHING CENTER

Even more important: the building aspect wouldn't matter so much if in each so-called "church" building a true *ekklesia* existed, and *ekklesia* principles applied. Many have tended to equate "going to church" with attending what is little more than a preaching center. They meet once or twice a week to take some small part in a structured service and hear a preacher. Others go weekly to services where the preaching isn't the main thing, but where they take part together in a time-honored ritual of singing, responding, reading or reciting, kneeling and standing.

The question is: is there real community among them, a real practical belonging to one another in the Holy Spirit? There may be, of course. But, the fact remains that the restoration of anything like real *koinonia* in a group of God's called-out, chosen ones, an *ekklesia*, is virtually unknown to millions of "church adherents" today.

THREE - FOLD CHURCH

An analysis of all the 112 occurrences of *ekklesia*, translated "church" in the New Testament, shows that they may be divided into three categories:

- A. The Church of Jesus Christ universal.
- B. The Church identified with a city or town.
- C. The Church in a home.

A. THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

This is what Jesus referred to when He said to Peter, "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*" Quite obviously He wasn't localizing it here. He meant all the called out, all the saved ones upon the Earth. Paul has a similar universal meaning in his mind when he writes to the

Ephesians that “*God gave Him (Jesus) as head over all things to the church which is His body.*” And further on: “*...that the manifold wisdom of God might be now made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*”

B. THE CITY CHURCH

On nearly a hundred occasions *ekklesia* refers to a city or town church. For example, seven of these are city churches referred to in the celebrated words of Jesus and the Spirit to the churches in the first three chapters of Revelation: for example, “*Unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write:...*”

In Acts 11 we read: “*news reached the church at Jerusalem.*” In Chapter 20, “*from Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.*” There are many other examples. We never read of the church of Asia, or of Greece, that is, or any sort of national church. It is always the church of a city or town.

We can glean from historical records that some of these towns or cities were large. Paul spent a long time founding and building city churches in such places: eighteen months at Corinth and three years at Ephesus, which, for example, was a city of about 200,000. So, it is clear that in some instances at least, the city church would have been far too large to meet in any one location. It had to be subdivided into smaller units.

Incidentally, the identity and the unity of the subdivided city church would seem to have been maintained by some meeting of its leaders. When Paul called for the Ephesian elders, there must have been close communication between them all as they appear to have assembled quickly enough. Paul addressed them as belonging to a single unit: “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock*” and “*shepherd the church of God*”

But where did the rank and file meet? Earlier, Luke referred to Paul’s daily discussions in “*the lecture room of Tyrannus.*” However, there is a lot of evidence that believers, during those early centuries, mostly met in private homes.

C. THE CHURCH IN THE HOME

The second chapter of Acts describes what is the beginning of New Testament church life and structure. Thousands “*from every nation under heaven*” heard Peter’s first sermon and responded. On the very first day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, three thousand were baptized in water and added to the small group of Jesus’ disciples.

Immediately, we read, they initiated the practice of meeting daily in the temple at Jerusalem—there was only one Jewish temple — and of breaking bread “*from house to house*” — *kat’oikon*. This term can also be rendered: “*in the various private homes.*” In Acts 5:42 we read that “*every day, in the temple and in the various private homes they kept right on teaching and preaching...*”

Soon after this the opposition of the orthodox Jews prevented the use of the temple. Synagogues were used for a while, but as we see in Acts 19 it was not long before many of these also were closed to Christians. But we continue to find significant references in Acts and the Epistles to churches in homes.

When, for example, in Acts 12, Herod began to arrest some who belonged to the church, and then seized and jailed Peter, we read that “*prayer was being made fervently by the church*” (v. 5) Where? Certainly not on any church premises. It was in the home of Mary, the mother of Mark. There it was that many were gathered together praying.

Then on the occasion of the Miletus assemblage of elders referred to above, Paul re-minded these men he had taught three years publicly and “*in the various private homes.*”

In the last chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul writes: “*Greet Priscilla and Aquila...also greet the church that is in their house...*” Elsewhere he mentions the church in Nympha’s house; and, when writing Philemon; “*the church in your house.*”

Most of us remember with sympathy Eutychus; dropping off to sleep during Paul’s long preaching and falling from the window sill of the third floor room where the local church was meeting. This seems to have been a private home.

Turning to the Gospels, we find that although Jesus Himself taught and preached in synagogues, in the temple and in the open air, He favored private houses for much of His ministry. Such home occasions resulted in the winning of the whole household to God, as in the case of Zacchaeus. Also, He frequently used homes for teaching and explanation, e.g. in Matthew 13: 16: “*He left the multitudes and went into the house, and His disciples came... saying ‘explain to us the parable of the tares of the field...’*”

Jesus’ healing also was often in homes, as in the instance when four men let down the paralytic through the roof.

Moreover, when Jesus commissioned His twelve apostles, (Matt 10) He sent them out to preach, heal, raise the dead and cast out demons. In every city and village they were to “*enter the house,*” implying that the private home was to be the focus of their ministry. Similarly, (Luke 10) He bade them “*enter houses*” first saying: “*Peace be to this house.*”

The point I wish to make is that Jesus ministered in ordinary, everyday places and didn’t build, or even suggest the necessity to build special centers or headquarters.

So, it seems clear that for Jesus and the early church, the home was a normal setting for prayer, teaching, worship and fellowship. In some smaller places such as Troas, it may have been that the whole complement of the church could meet in one home. But this was obviously impossible in the case of “*all who were beloved of God in Rome*” where we know there were thousands of Christians even in Paul’s lifetime. Here no doubt, public halls were used for larger gatherings, while the basic meeting places remained the homes already mentioned, such as that of Aquila and Priscilla.

The main point to grasp is that the Bible speaks of only two localized groupings of the church universal: the city church and the church in the home. In the History of Christianity (Lion) it is stated quite categorically that the earliest Christians had no special buildings but met in private homes.

Justin Martyr (100-165 AD.) as recorded in The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs, was asked by Rusticus the Prefect: “*Where do you assemble?*” Justin said: “*Where each one chooses and can, for do you fancy that we all meet in the very same place? Not so: because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place.*”

FULL LIFE IN CHRIST, Group Facilitator Suggestions
EMPOWER: Adopting the Lifestyle, Session 5

FIRST

- Go over this week's question sheet.
- Have additional "Letters of Testimony" shared if the people have the freedom to do so. Collect those that are completed.

NOW

Ask the members of the group to share their outstanding church experiences - that is, "What experience in their church life has made the deepest impression on them?"

THEN

Discuss tonight's teaching

1. What new insights will you have when you hear the word "church" after tonight's session?
(Perhaps you will want to go around the group letting each one share)
2. What part does "Koinonia" play in any true understanding of what God sees the church to be?
3. Ask the group what kinds of situations they can suggest in which members of the body might be called upon to demonstrate Love and Loyalty to one another.

FOR NEXT WEEK

1. Complete the Study Questions for Session 5. Tell the group they will need to carefully read the article given to them this week entitled "Church-Ekklesia"
2. Encourage any who have not yet completed their "Letter of Testimony" to do so and to bring you a copy next week.