

The importance of church

Romans 1:11-12 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

What is the church for?

1. **SHOUT-OUT** What do you think the church is for?

Just write their answers on a flip-chart, don't try to come to a conclusion.

*2. Read Romans 1:11. Why does Paul want to meet up with the Christians in Rome?

He wants to see them in the hope that he may be able to 'impart some spiritual gift to make you strong' i.e. give them teaching that will make them strong (spiritually) – he has their spiritual welfare in mind, not a holiday in Italy!

*3. Read Romans 1:12. What does Paul hope will happen for everyone involved if he goes to Rome, and how is this relevant to churches today?

He hopes that he and they will be encouraged by each other's faith. This is one of the reasons that church fellowship is so important, whether it's in a church building, in a house or under a tree. We all need encouragement.

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Imagine a coal fire. The coals are red-hot because they are in the fire. What happens if you take one coal away from the fire? How does this picture help us to understand the importance of a Christian being part of a church?

Explain that today we're going to look around the Bible to find out more about the importance of the church and believers getting involved.

*4. The church has 3 main purposes - ministry to God, ministry to believers and ministry to the world. Look up the following verses to find out what these involve:

Ministry to God	Ephesians 5:19-20	<i>Give praise and thanksgiving to God</i>
Ministry to believers	Colossians 1:28	<i>Teaching God's word so that everyone may be 'perfect in Christ' – i.e. become mature Christians, becoming more like Jesus in their character</i>
Ministry to the world	Matthew 28:19	<i>Share the gospel</i>
	James 2:17	<i>Putting our faith into action</i>

Section summary: *the church exists to bring glory to God, to bring believers together to become mature Christians and to share the gospel with unbelievers.*

Who has authority over the church?

5. **STICKERS** Who do you think the church belongs to?

Read the through the answers but don't come to a conclusion.

*6. Read Matthew 16:18. (Jesus is talking in this verse). Who will build the church?

Jesus. If it comes up, v16 explains what Jesus means by 'on this rock' – it's the confession of Christ as Son of the living God, not Peter himself (this is something that the Protestant and Catholic churches differ on).

*7. Read Acts 2:46-47. Who will grow the church?

Jesus. It's not our responsibility to make people believe, only Jesus can do that. But we are responsible for sharing the gospel.

The marriage of Jesus Christ and the church 'is the ultimate relationship, the only marriage that endures for eternity. If you want to understand how committed Jesus is to the church, here's your answer. He doesn't just create it and let it be. He marries it.' (Allberry 2016, p22)

8. Read Ephesians 5:23-32. What do you learn about the church?

v32 – 'This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.' – don't get distracted by the husband and wife analogy! Look for all the information the passage gives about the relationship between Christ and the church: Jesus is head of the church, the church submits to Jesus, etc.

*9. Jesus is the shepherd of his people and some people are put in positions of authority, as under-shepherds. What does 1 Timothy 3:1-10 tell us about the qualifications necessary for someone who has authority in the church?

Who is in authority is a big subject, especially when it involves multiple denominations! Try to focus on the Biblical description of elders (responsible for teaching and preaching) and deacons (responsible for practical work, Acts 6:1-7).

*10. Why do you think the Bible says that such qualifications are necessary for those in church leadership? What do they teach us about the integrity and example expected of church leaders?

Section summary: *the church belongs to Jesus and he has authority over it (Eph 5:23). Jesus has put certain people in positions of human authority in the (local or global) church. The picture is of Jesus as the Shepherd and the church leaders as under-shepherds – people with devolved responsibility.*

What are the benefits of church?

Question 11 is a **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTION**. Write it out on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs. Give each pair just 1 or 2 of the references, and draw the table on the flip-chart as you download the answers from the whole group.

11. **SDL** Look up the following passages. How is the church, or its people, described? What do you think this means?

Verse	Description	Meaning
John 15:5	<i>Branches on a vine</i>	<i>Jesus is the vine. We, the church, are plugged into Jesus. We can only bear fruit if we stay plugged in.</i>
1 Peter 2:5 (first thing)	<i>Living stones</i>	<i>We are the stones that build the spiritual house (the church)</i>
1 Peter 2:5 (second thing)	<i>Priesthood</i>	<i>Priesthood of all believers – we all have a role to play. (Spiritual sacrifices = time, energy, money, doing good etc.)</i>
1 Timothy 3:15	<i>God's household</i>	<i>The church is God's household, the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church's role includes defending the truth of Scripture</i>
1 Corinthians 12:27	<i>The church is the body of Christ, the people are part of the body</i>	<i>Together, we make up the whole body, which is the church. 'Church is therefore not a meeting you attend, but a body you belong to.' (Allberry 2016, p30)</i>

12. Look up these verses, to find out how relationships within the church are described.

Verse	Relationship
2 Corinthians 6:18	(Our relationship with God the Father) <i>God is our Father and we are his sons and daughters</i>
James 2:15	(Our relationship with each other) <i>We are brothers and sisters in Christ</i>
Revelation 21:2	(Our relationship with Jesus) <i>The church is the bride of Christ ('the new Jerusalem' refers not the city on earth, but the heavenly city of Christ's saved people)</i>

13. How do the verses in Q11 & 12 help us to know how we, as a church, should love, support and treat one another?

*14. Read Proverbs 13:20. In what way does this verse encourage you to belong to a good church?

*15. How do you recognise a good church?

Think about the signs that a church is sound / true – preaching from the word, salvation by grace alone, welcoming, helps you to grow in Christ and in serving others, etc.

*16. Hebrews 10:25 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...'

Think about the value of belonging to the local church and encouraging one another in / being encouraged by others in / serving the local church.

Section summary: *the benefits of church are growth and encouragement in your relationship with God, serving God and each other, actively belonging to the Christian family and hearing the Bible explained clearly.*

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For those who are due to be released in the next 6 months, is there a local church you are already involved in or would like to be involved in?

You need to speak to the chaplains about local policy, but it is very helpful for the prisoner and the church if visits from a mature church member can be arranged prior to release in order to get to know each other and start to think about the issues surrounding release and living as a Christian outside the prison.

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

The importance of church

Romans 1:11-12

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2. Read Romans 1:11.

3. Read Romans 1:12. What does Paul hope will happen for everyone involved if he goes to Rome, and how is this relevant to churches today?

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