

Jesus' Church

g r o u p s t u d y



Lesson 3
The Teaching

this book belongs to

date

Make the Most of this Study

The following recommendations will help your Jesus' Church Study Group experience the intended outcomes:

1. Each lesson builds upon the previous lesson, so work together and find a way to cover all seven lessons in as close to seven weeks as possible.
2. Invite everyone to bring their Bibles and pens.
3. If possible, sit at a table to be able to read, write, snack, and be closer to one another.

** Supplemental teaching videos and downloadable booklets are all available through the BFAM App. Visit: <https://bit.ly/BFAMapp> or scan the QR code.*



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Though the ESV and certain English versions do not capitalize divine pronouns, they have been capitalized in this resource.

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"And they devoted themselves
to the

apostles' teachings,

and the fellowship, to the
breaking of bread and
the prayers."

Acts 2:42

03 | The Teaching

Welcome to Lesson Three of the Jesus' Church group study! Let's open in prayer and ask God to teach us today about Jesus' Church.

Before we begin this week's lesson, let's each take 30 to 60 seconds (max) to share about something we received from this past week's scriptures. [Invite everyone to share.]

Thanks to each of you for sharing. At the end of this lesson, you'll find this week's 7-Day Plan. Once again, we'll take 10 to 15 minutes a day to read a short Scripture passage, write the answer to a question or two, and pray that God will use us that day to minister to people.

Four Priorities of the Early Church

Okay, let's begin Lesson Three: "The Teaching."

We now know that the foundation of Jesus' Church is the divine revelation of the person of Jesus Christ and our faith-filled response to Him. We also know that being filled with the Holy Spirit provides every member of Jesus' Church with the power we need to be personally built up, to build up other believers, and to impact the world. Our next four lessons will deal with the four priorities of the early church. Today's lesson is called "The Teaching."

Let's begin by reading Acts 2:41–42:

"So those who received [Peter's] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Notice in verse 42 that the people of this new, fast-growing church devoted themselves to four priorities:

1. the apostles' teaching,
2. the fellowship,
3. the breaking of bread, and
4. the prayers.

The English Standard Version (ESV) accurately includes the definite article “the” four times in these verses, once before each of the four priorities, just as it appears in the Greek text. In other words, the early church was not devoted to just anyone’s teaching; rather it was devoted specifically to “the apostles’ teaching.” In the same way, the believers were not devoted to just any fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. They were devoted to “the fellowship” that the apostles taught and shared with them, “the breaking of bread” that the apostles taught them, and “the prayers” (and methods of prayer) that the apostles taught.

Why were they so devoted to what the apostles taught them? The 12 apostles had been personally chosen, disciplined, and mentored by Jesus. So there was no need for anyone to guess how Jesus wanted the people of His Church to live, worship, care for each other, and reach the world. These men already knew. It took Jesus several years to teach and train them, and now it was their turn to teach the people of this new church what they had learned from Jesus.

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We should also remember that the New Testament had not been written yet. Jesus used the Old Testament Scriptures, along with many new parables and instructions, to teach the 12. Think about that. Since the New Testament did not yet exist, these 12 apostles were the most reliable source of how to live as New Testament believers, so the people of the early church followed what the apostles taught them. No wonder Jesus spent so much time with the 12—they would be the first to lay the foundation of Jesus’ Church!

And now that the Holy Spirit had been poured out, the apostles were filled with the Spirit just as Jesus was. They could now teach and train every new believer to live the New Testament, Spirit-empowered life that Jesus Himself lived and that He taught them to live. So, in addition to the power of the Holy Spirit, we now see another reason why the early church was so effective. The people of the early church devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.

The Impact of the Word

How impactful was the apostles' teaching? Very! Let's look again at Acts 2 and see just how affected these new believers were and how quickly their values and priorities changed. Let's read verses 41-47:

"So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The apostles' teaching is arguably the most important ... it was how these new believers learned the lifestyle and values of Jesus.

What would cause people who just joined a new movement to sell valuable possessions and give their money away? What would cause them to go to the temple every single day to hear teaching from men they just recently met? What would cause them to take even more time during the week to meet with other believers in their homes? And what would cause them to be so committed to the four priorities? There were no doubt numerous factors, but aside from the power of the Holy Spirit, none was more influential than the apostles' teaching.

The apostles' teaching is arguably the most important of the four priorities because it was how these new believers learned the lifestyle and values of Jesus. Without the apostles' teaching, the early church wouldn't know which priorities were the most important to Jesus. But this was Jesus' plan. He taught and trained the 12 apostles so that they could teach and train the people of His Church. Therefore, learning from the 12 apostles was as close as the believers of the early church could get to being taught and trained by Jesus Himself.

The 12 apostles had been so convinced by Jesus that the anointed teaching of the Word was crucial that even when there was a widespread complaint against the early church which required additional people to serve food to widows, the apostles refused to relinquish their responsibility of teaching the Word and instead hired seven other people to minister to the widows. And because they continued to give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, “the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7).

Now, how can we follow the apostles' teaching today since the apostles died many years ago? Let's talk about three categories of New Testament teaching:

1. the teaching of the 12 apostles,
2. the teaching of the New Testament, and
3. all other teaching.

The Teaching of the 12 Apostles

Jesus' 12 apostles are in a category all their own because they were personally discipled and mentored by Him for about two and a half years. So, in the early church, their teaching was appropriately recognized as the most reliable and highest authority, second only to the (Old Testament) Scriptures. Once these men died, this category ceased to exist. That's the bad news. The good news is that their teachings did not die with them.

*“The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”
(Acts 6:7)*

The Teaching of the New Testament

Thankfully, some of the 12 apostles wrote gospels and letters while being completely yielded to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This includes the gospels of Matthew and John, the letters of Peter and John, and the prophetic book of Revelation. But that's not all the good news. The Holy Spirit also inspired other apostles who were not members of the original 12 to write New Testament Scripture, including Paul, Mark, Luke, and Jesus' own brothers, James and Jude. And these writings are by no means second-class, as Paul clarified in 2 Timothy 3:16 when he said, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.”

Therefore, the writings of the “non-12” apostles, which make up over two-thirds of the New Testament, are just as much the words of God as any of the other Scriptures. And not only that, but the Holy Spirit used Peter, one of the 12 apostles, to teach us that the Scriptures are even more reliable than any of the (non-Scripture) teachings of the 12. Consider 2 Peter 1:16–21:

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Did you hear that? Peter said that even though he saw Jesus in His glory with his own eyes, and though he heard the audible voice of Father God with his own ears, the prophetic word of Scripture is more fully confirmed than a mere firsthand account. He explained the reason for this in verses 20–21. Peter, who was himself writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that no prophecy of Scripture came from the author’s own interpretation, but that instead, the authors “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

The Bible should be acknowledged as God’s Word. We must consider it to be absolute truth and the final authority.

What does this tell us? It tells us that the written Scripture—the entire Bible—is the most reliable teaching, and therefore, the written New Testament is the most reliable source of the apostles’ teaching. It also tells us that the Bible should be acknowledged as God’s Word. We must consider it to be absolute truth and the final authority against which all other wisdom, knowledge, teaching, and opinions should be judged. Therefore, the New Testament is now the primary “apostles’ teaching.”

All Other Teaching

Though there are many wonderful and anointed teachings from Christian leaders today—just as there have been throughout the centuries—they all fall into this third category of “non-original 12 and non-Scripture teaching.” Therefore, they must all be judged and measured for accuracy against the standard of the truth of God’s written and inspired Word. Today’s apostles, leaders, and teachers should be teaching the Scriptures everywhere they go and also affirming that the Scriptures are the highest authority.

Some may wonder, do we still need human leaders and teachers now that we have the New Testament? Yes, we do. Let’s look at something the apostle Paul taught Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16–4:2:

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 4:1 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

In 1 Timothy 1:3, we learn that Paul left Timothy in the city of Ephesus to be his apostolic representative primarily to address false teachers and teachings. Timothy’s assignment was to teach and reiterate the “apostolic teaching” of Paul. And now, in this second inspired letter to Timothy, Paul explains how this third category of apostles’ teaching works. Let’s break it down in three parts.

“All scripture is breathed out by God ... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

First, in 2 Timothy 3:17 Paul tells Timothy that through the teaching of the Scriptures, “the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work” (NASB). This makes sense because the same God who designed each believer’s calling is the one who “breathed out” all the truths of Scripture to teach them what they need to know and do to fulfill their callings.

Second, in verse 16 Paul tells Timothy that because of this the Scriptures should be used to teach, reprove, correct, and train believers.

And third, in 4:1–2 Paul strongly charges Timothy not to teach just anything he has read or learned, but rather to teach and preach the Scriptures. At the end of verse 2, Paul told him to preach the Word with complete patience and “teaching.”

The Greek word translated “teaching” in 2 Timothy 4:2 is the identical word used in Acts 2:42 referring to the apostles’ “teaching.” So, Paul was telling Timothy to use the reliable teachings of Scripture to teach the leaders and believers in Ephesus. This shows us that the 12 apostles of Jesus and the New Testament Scriptures are not the only “apostles’ teaching” needed. We still need the “apostles’ teaching” today. And, like Timothy, leaders today must preach and teach the Word of God, the Bible, and help believers understand how to apply it to their lives.

The church in Ephesus was not only one church. It was a collective or network of many house churches.

Church Networks

It's also important to understand that, like the other churches in the New Testament, the church in Ephesus was not only one church. It was a collective or network of many house churches. So Timothy's assignment was not to stand in one building and speak to one church gathering, but rather his assignment was to teach, train, and oversee the various elders and teachers of many house churches in Ephesus. These churches were therefore not independent. They were clearly under the apostolic leadership of Paul and Timothy. Paul was also an apostolic leader over other house church networks in cities such as Corinth, Philippi, and Thessalonica, as well as in regions like Galatia.

Another biblical example of apostolic leadership is that Paul left Titus on the island of Crete and gave him the assignment of an apostle: to put things in order and appoint elders in every city (Titus 1:5). It seems evident that the number of house churches in these cities was growing, so each city now needed its own elders. Paul and Titus were therefore apostles overseeing the many churches and elders on the island of Crete.

Paul, Timothy, and Titus were not part of Jesus' original group of 12 apostles, yet they were clearly called to be apostles and to teach and oversee churches and leaders. So once again, the New Testament makes it clear that apostolic leaders are still needed to help Jesus' Church continue to grow, expand, and be strong.

God gives apostles supernatural ability through the Holy Spirit to teach and establish believers and churches on the foundational truths of God's Word. Paul called this divine enablement "grace" in passages such as 1 Corinthians 2:10–11:

"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Paul understood that his assignment as an apostle was to lay a solid foundation of truth and then to continue teaching the Word of God to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). The many house churches he oversaw in Corinth were collectively called "the church at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul delivered "the apostles' teaching" to them through various means—writing letters, teaching them in person, and sending other trusted ministry leaders to them (2 Corinthians 8:16-24). In the same way, apostolic leaders today use a variety of methods and technology to teach believers, leaders, churches, and church networks. But regardless of the means, all of the teachings must be based on and be in accordance with the Word of God.

For any group of believers to change and become the church Jesus wants them to be, their hearts and minds must be changed first.

If the Church today continues with business-as-usual, we will never make disciples of our own nation, much less all nations. Being Jesus' Church requires focus and discipline. It requires that we say "no" to many things so that we can say "yes" to the things Jesus has called us to do. Jesus knew that it was absolutely essential for the early church to be taught by leaders who had His heart and were full of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus knows that it's absolutely essential in these last days as well.

Apostolic leaders who are full of the Holy Spirit point us to the Scriptures and lead us to focus on the more important, higher-value priorities. They strengthen us to do things we wouldn't otherwise do and to become the Church Jesus wants us to be.

They lead us to think beyond ourselves and our own ministries to pursue the Great Commission to reach the world. They help us avoid the spiritually barren life of convenience that many believers live, and they don't allow us to be carried away with the modern-day winds of false doctrine. They always lead us back to the truth of God's Word.

For any group of believers to change and become the church Jesus wants them to be, their hearts and minds must be changed first. This happens by hearing from God. Psalm 1 says:

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners... 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."

Jesus taught the 12 apostles to continually delight in the Word of God. He said things like, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32, NASB), and "If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you" (John 15:7, CSB). In turn, the 12 apostles taught the early church to delight daily in the Word of God. So the early church began to feed on the Word of God every day, and it completely changed how they thought, what they valued, and even what they enjoyed doing.

"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples." (John 8:31, NASB)

Let's close by looking at Acts 2 one more time and discussing some questions about its truths. Let's read Acts 2:42-47:

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Discussion Questions

1. How often, and in what ways, did the apostles teach the Acts 2 early church members what they had learned from Jesus? Did the early church members obey the apostles' teaching?
2. In what ways did the apostles' teaching affect the early church members' values, lifestyle, and daily and weekly schedules? What supernatural results were the members of the Acts 2 church already experiencing?
3. How often, and in what ways, should we be receiving the teaching of the Word of God, especially the New Testament?
4. What changes do we already know we must make to obey God's Word and the apostles' teaching to be the church Jesus wants us to be? What results can we expect as we make these changes?
5. What teaching(s) could each of us watch, listen to, or read this week to increase our intake of "the apostles' teaching"?

Close in Prayer

As we close, let's all earnestly ask God to strengthen us to take additional time receiving and delighting in God's Word this week. And let's also pray that He will help us as a group to learn and do what He wants us to learn and do.

*"... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."
(Acts 2:47)*

7-Day Plan | Week Three

Day 1 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: Psalm 1:1-3

Write: How can you live this way? How would you benefit from living this way?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

(James 1:22)

Day 2 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: John 15:1-8

Write: What are the results of abiding in God's Word? How exactly do we abide in the Word?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Day 3 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Write: How should you hear and respond to the Word of God? How is that different from what you have been doing?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Day 4 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: Psalm 119:9–11

Write: What results come from flooding your heart with God's Word? How can you do that?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Day 5 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: Joshua 1:6–9

Write: What does God teach us to do to build strength, to grow in courage, and to cause our lives to prosper?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

Day 6 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: John 8:31–36

Write: What are the effects of constantly feeding on God's Word?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

(Romans 10:17)

Day 7 | My daily scripture and prayer

Read: James 1:22–25

Write: What does this passage teach us about being in God's Word consistently?

Pray: Submit yourself to God today as a member of Jesus' Church, and ask Him to use you to minister to people.

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