

Lesson 3: The Church United

What we want students to learn: That, based on being a part of the Church, God has in mind specific ways they are to interact with those in their Church, other Christ-followers, and those who don't know Christ.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To choose one of the groups of people mentioned (those within their church, other Christ-followers who attend other churches, or non-Believers) , and commit to living out Scripture's call as it relates to their interactions with these people.

Scripture Focus: Romans 15:5-6, Philippians 2:1-4, Ephesians 4:1-6, Colossians 4:5-6

Overview: It's not hard to look around these days and find that, as much as ever in our culture, Christ-followers find themselves increasingly marginalized. And yet in this climate, the Church still struggles with internal division within local bodies, as well as external apathy (or worse, conflict) between churches. The problem with this is that Scripture calls us to a higher standard. The Body is supposed to be unified, particularly in the local churches. And we are to be united on mission for Christ with all Believers with Christ. The powerful thing is that if we were to actually live out these practices, we would find ourselves drawing people to us because of the evident fruit of God in our midst. This final lesson in your students' study of the Church is a call to unity, in order that they might show the world the purpose and power available to those who follow Jesus.

Teacher Prep Video

The *elements Teacher Prep Videos* are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your "The Church Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/the-church-teacher-prep>

Bible Background

The **Bible Background** is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. *The Details* gives you background info for each book, while *The Main Point* gives you an overview of how the passages are used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **ym360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

The Details

Romans

- **Author:** Paul is the author of Romans.

- **Time frame:** Romans was probably written from Corinth in the winter of 56-57 AD.
- **Purpose:** Since the church in Rome had not received comprehensive theological teaching on salvation and other implications of following Christ, Paul wrote Romans to ensure a good understanding of such things. In addition, since many Jewish Christians were rejecting some of the new Gentile converts, it was essential that a 'level playing field' be given to all Believers. This is what Paul was advocating for in Romans.

Philippians

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
- **Time frame:** Philippians was one of the last letters Paul wrote before he was martyred, sometime around A.D 62.
- **Purpose:** Philippians was written to Paul's close friends at the Philippian church, thanking them for their kindness and prayers while he was in prison. And he was encouraging them not to lose their faith because of his persecution.

Ephesians

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians and Titus. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
- **Time frame:** Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.
- **Purpose:** Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

Colossians

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul identified himself as the author of Colossians.
- **Time frame:**
- Most people believe Colossians was written sometime between A.D. 61 and 63, during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:17-31).
- **Purpose:** Ultimately, this letter's purpose is to emphasize the supremacy of Christ over everything. Paul was writing to combat the spread of false teachings among the church at Colossae. The exact heresy being refuted is not certain and may have been a blend of multiple influences. The legalism, mysticism, and asceticism corrupting the pure faith in Colossae were moving attention away from Christ, placing it instead on self-discipline and the awe of other spiritual things.

The Main Point

Paul writes his letters in order to encourage and challenge the churches he had previously met. He wanted to remind them of the role they had in the spread of gospel and encourage them in the face of hardship and persecution.

- You'll begin by helping students see that as members of your local Body of believers, they are to be unified, acting together on mission for God. You'll make this case using the Romans and Philippians passages.

- Then, using the Ephesians passage, you'll show students that as part of the global Body, the "Big C" Church, they are called to be "at peace" with other Christ-followers, even if they differ in certain aspects of their faith.
- Finally, you'll show students that as the Church, they're called to act with non-Believers in such a way that those apart from Christ would recognize a difference in your students and want what they have. You'll make this point using the Colossians passage.

Lesson Plan

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: An introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible study section called *The Main Event*; an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

The Lead In

- **Goal:** To introduce students to the three groups of people that will be discussed in this lesson.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need a map of your city to display, the bigger the better. Any look will do, so if all you have is a Google map on a tablet or laptop, you can make do with that. But if you could access an actual large, printed map, it would be perfect.

FIRST, begin this lesson by displaying a large map of your city. (*Note to leader: If you live in a large city, you may choose to use a section of your city that is relevant to your group rather than the entire map.*) First, have each student try to locate some local landmarks of your choosing, getting as close as possible to its actual location. Next, have them try to locate their street or the area where they live. Then, have them locate their schools. Finally, locate your church or its general area.

THEN, lead a discussion using the following questions:

- **What are some things that make our town/city unique?**
 - *Answers will vary*
- **Where are some of your favorite places to visit?**
 - *Answers will vary*
- **What are some things that make our town/city like other ones?**
 - *Answers may include a hospital, roads, homes, churches, certain chain restaurants or stores, etc.*

FINALLY, transition from this discussion by saying something like:

- **There are a variety of things that make towns or cities very similar. However, it's unlikely that you will find two that are exactly the same. Today we will talk about something that you will find in nearly every region in our country and many others, as well. We will finish our discussions about the Church by identifying practical ways we can promote unity within our local Church and among churches in our community, and then we'll look at how we can impact non-Believers.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to learn that, based on being a part of the Church, God has in mind specific ways they are to interact with those in their Church, other Christ followers, and those who don't know Christ.
- **Set-Up:** Have a dry-erase board or large sheet of poster paper with three columns. Also have markers to write on them.

FIRST, review what you have discussed in the previous lessons using the following points:

- **The foundations of the Church begin when God called Israel as a people who would be uniquely His. His plan all along was to one day make inclusion in His family available to all people groups, not just the Israelites.**
- **The Church, this global Body of Believers, is God's plan to impact this world in His name.**
- **While there was a point in time when there were restrictions placed upon who was part of God's chosen nation, those restrictions were lifted when Christ came. He fulfilled all the requirements of the law so salvation could be made available to all by grace through faith.**
- **Our confession of Christ as Lord automatically enables us to join in the literally countless number of people throughout time who have made the same confession. The Bible depicts the Church as the Body of Christ, with Christ as the head. Each and every believer included as a vital part.**

THEN, transition into Bible study by saying something like:

- **We know, based on our previous studies, that anyone who confesses faith in Christ is part of His Church. But what does this mean for us practically? Let's take a look at this in relation to three groups of people. First, we're called to be unified with our local Body of Believers, people in our own church, to act together on mission for God.**

Have students find Romans 15 in their Bibles. As they are turning to it, use the Bible background to give them context for this passage. Then read or have a student read Romans 15:5-6. After reading, say something like:

- **Prior to these verses Paul has addressed some issue that have come up that are often called "matters of indifference." They were issues stemming from religious backgrounds or one's level of spiritual maturity that were not major theological differences. These may have been different understandings of dietary laws or religious customs based on previous religious experiences.**

Continue your discussion using the following questions:

- **In light of these "matters of indifference," what do you think the word unity means in this context?**
 - *Answer:* Paul is not telling them they should all think exactly the same way, or hold the same beliefs on issues that aren't central to the faith. Instead unity means tolerating these differences and working together in spite of them.
- **In verse 5, Paul uses the phrase "as you follow Jesus." How does following Jesus help the church to maintain unity among differences of opinions and preferences?**
 - *Answer:* As we follow Jesus, we are all following the same leader and respond to things with His mindset and as He would respond.
- **According to this passage, what does a spirit of unity enable the local church to do in its community?**
 - *Answer:* To glorify God with one mouth and one heart, in essence, it enables the spread of the Gospel.

NEXT, explain that unity is one of the expectations of Christ-followers within the same local church body. This unity can impact our mission in the world either in a positive way or a negative way. Have students turn to Philippians 2 in their Bibles. As they are finding it, use the Bible Background to give them context, also pointing out that this passage supports the main idea of unity found in the Romans passage. Then, read or have a student read Philippians 2:1-4. Say something like:

- **This passage supports the main idea of unity in Romans. It takes it a step further in telling us how we can further unity in the local church. What are some of the ways this passage tells us we can achieve unity in the local body?**

- *Answer:* By being selfless and humble, putting the needs of others before our own, not seeking to have things “my way” all the time.
- **What do you think Paul means when he tells the people to be “like-minded?”**
 - *Answer:* It doesn’t mean we are like robots that all think and act the exact same way. We are followers of Christ and seek to think like Him. While we may have some different ideas, to be like-minded, we must align with Christ.
- **(Draw students’ attention to the board or poster.) What are some practical ways we maintain peace here in our own church?**
 - *Answers will vary; write them in the first column on your board or poster. Challenge students to be realistic as they list ideas.*

THEN, say something like:

- **As we have just seen, God expects His people in the local church to be unified for the sake of His glory. Unity and harmony don’t stop there. As part of the global Body, the “Big C Church,” you are called to be “at peace” with other Christ-followers, even if you differ in certain aspects of your faith.**

Have students find Ephesians 4 in their Bibles. While they are turning, give them the context using the Bible background provided. Read or have a student read Ephesians 4:1-5. Explain that here in the US, people disagree on many things such as politics, education, family values, economics, and morals. When you throw religion into the mix things can sometimes become really ugly! Explain that God, however, makes it clear that among the global Body, we are to maintain and live in peace. Ask:

- **According to the passage we just read, what is it that unifies the global Body of Believers?**
 - *Answer:* We all serve one Lord, one God, and share one faith. At the core of our beliefs, we are the same.
- **If we are united by this one Lord that we all serve, it seems like unity and peace should be a natural occurrence. So why do we seem to have division and competition among different church bodies?**
 - *Answers may vary*

Explain that there will always be disagreements on interpretation and application of Scripture. We’ll have different convictions. But remind students that we’re called to be “at peace” with our fellow Brothers and Sister’s in Christ, rallying around what unites us not dividing on what separates us. Explain that ultimately how a person behaves and treats others is their own decision. Ask:

- **(Again, draw students’ attention to your board) Knowing we all choose how we act toward one another, what are some practical ways we can choose to act that will promote peace among all Believers, even those who may not see things as we do?**
 - *Answers will vary; write them in the second column on your board or poster. Challenge students to be realistic as they list ideas.*

NEXT, say something like:

- **Just as the local church is designed to bring glory to God and make His Gospel known, so is the global Church. When we live in peace and unity in spite of our differences, non-Believers see something very different than what they are accustomed to in our world.**

FINALLY, have students find Colossians 4 in their Bibles. Read or have a student read Colossians 4:5-6. Then, ask:

- **What does Paul mean when he uses the word “outsiders” in verse 5?**
 - *Answer:* Non-believers, people who don’t have a relationship with Christ.

- **According to these verses, are we instructed to ignore or avoid those who are non-believers? Instead, how does he instruct believers to interact?**
 - *Answer:* NO! We are to be intentional in our conversations, use interactions as an opportunity to share the Gospel, and to be different than those who don't know Christ.
- **Do you have people you know don't have a relationship with Christ that you are intentional about building relationships with?**
 - *Answers will vary*

As you close out the Bible study time, draw them back to the board. Say something like:

- **As the Church, you're called to act with non-Believers in such a way that they would recognize a difference in you and want what you have. As we have talked about already, there are practical ways to show that we are different to non-believers. What are some practical ways we can interact with "outsiders" in order to share the gospel and make Christ's name and God's glory known to them?**
 - *Answers will vary.* Write them in the third column on your board or poster. Challenge students to be realistic as they list ideas.

As you close out your Bible study, remind your students that the Church is God's way of making the Gospel known and sharing the message of salvation with those who don't know Him. As vital members of His Church, your students are part of this and share in the responsibility of the Church.

The Last Word

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to choose one of the groups of people mentioned (those within their church, other Christ-followers who attend other churches, or non-Believers), and commit to living out Scripture's call as it relates to their interactions with these people.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need the map from The Lead In activity, scissors, and dark markers, such as black Sharpies, and the list of three columns you created in "The Main Event."

FIRST, explain that you've talked about some practical ways tonight to interact and relate to three groups of people. But you can't let it just be talk and pretty lists. Now is the time that you put it into action.

THEN, refer back to the map from "The Lead In" activity and say something like:

- **This is our community. It's our home. It's where we go to school, play sports, shop, and participate in our church. It's where we live life.** *Use the scissors to cut the map and give a portion to each student. Have the markers out for them to share (unless you have enough for each to have one).*

NEXT, have them look at the lists you created and reflect for a moment. Say something like:

- **We discussed practical ways to promote unity and also live differently among "outsiders." This talk does no good if there is no action to follow. Take a moment to evaluate each list and choose one you will do this next week. Once you have decided, write it on your piece of map. This is your reminder to live out your role in the Church this week.**

FINALLY, close your time together by allowing students to pray for God to use them in the coming week, then by praying for them and your local church.

- Don't forget to distribute the "The Church Lesson 3" devotions to your students. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Facebook, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

- Consider texting students a couple of times during the week to encourage them to follow through with reading the devotions.

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?

Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.

