

CHURCH.

LESSON 23

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. *Pray* for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about church building to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> 1 TIMOTHY 5 - 6 and 2 TIMOTHY 1
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Take turns and *share (or read)* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (1 Timothy 5 -6 and 2 Timothy 1). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) <i>[KEY VERSES IN JOHN]</i> (10) JOHN 10:28
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Review two by two.

(10) John 10:28. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) <i>[CHURCH AND CULTURE]</i> HUMAN CULTURE AND THE CULTURE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD
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Introduce. This teaching is about human culture and the kingdom of God culture. We see that human culture is changing continually, but the culture of the kingdom of God always remains the same. What the Bible teaches about the Christian's relationship to his living parents and to his departed ancestors is found in manual 6, supplement 7 and 8.

A. THE CHANGING CULTURE OF NATIONS

Introduce. All the different relationships between people and their behaviour are strongly influenced by their culture.

1. The definition of "culture".

Discuss. What is "culture"? What are the various components of culture?

Notes. The culture of any group of people is their world-view, truths, beliefs, superstitions and values that are expressed in their convictions, experiences, behaviour, relationships and institutions (customs and traditions).

2. The origin of human culture.

Read Genesis 1:28-29; 2:15; 3:17; 4:16-22; 10:1 to 11:9.

Discover and discuss. How did human culture originate?

Notes. Genesis chapters 1 to 11 describe the beginning of human culture in the world: It describes the beginning of the material universe and the beginning of the human race (the descendents of Adam and Eve)¹. It describes the beginning of God's revelation to man and the beginning of human sin (violating God's will). It describes the beginning of human suffering and the beginning of God's plan of salvation. And finally, it describes the beginning of human family life, the beginning of man-made civilisation and the beginning of the different nations in the world, each with its own culture.

According to the Bible, the origin of human culture lies at the beginning of the history of mankind in this world. As the various groups of people separated from one another and developed into different nations (Genesis 11:1-9), they developed differences in their cultures. Throughout the centuries the nations forgot the living God and his will. "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). So the original human culture continued to degenerate into religious idolatry, philosophic speculation and fanciful imaginations. These continued to contribute to the formation of the different human cultures. Today, the nations of the world can hardly imagine that they all had the same original culture at the beginning of history.

3. The origin of a value system.

Discover and discuss. In what way did people in the world know by nature what is *good* and *right*?

Read Psalm 19:1-4; Acts 17:24-27; Romans 1:18-20,25,28,32; **Read** Romans 2:14-15.

¹ People, who reject this, slide into the theory of evolution and descent from apes.

Notes. God reveals some of his truth through his creation. By observing the creation, people see and understand the existence of the God of the Bible as Creator and Sustainer and discover God's immense power to create energy (light), matter, gravity, space and time. They can discover the amazing physical and chemical laws he established within creation and observe the beauty and orderliness of his creation.

God reveals some of his truth in the heart, mind and conscience of man. By listening to the voice of their heart, mind and conscience, people know and understand the basic moral truths and values, like the commandments: "You shall not murder", "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not steal", and "You shall not lie or give false testimony".

4. The good and the bad aspects of every human culture.

Discuss. What are the good and what are the bad aspects of a culture?

Read Deuteronomy 16:18-20; 1 Kings 10:1-9 and Jeremiah 7:22-29; 10:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Notes. All human cultures have good and acceptable aspects. For example, incorruptible politicians and businessmen, just laws and fair judges, hardworking labourers and well-behaved citizens, institutions of mercy and relationships of courtesy and love.

But, because all people are sinners, all human cultures in the world have evil and unacceptable aspects. Human cultures contain worldviews based on non-Christian philosophies, political ideologies and false religious theologies. Their religious convictions are based on the speculations and lies devised by some religious teacher or prophet. Their value system and behaviour (for example towards women) are often unjust and immoral, government institutions do not protect their citizens against the killing people on religious grounds (jihad, revenge of honour), against killing on ethical grounds (abortion, euthanasia), against criminals (drugs gangs, the possession and threats with weapons, masked attacks and robberies) or against all kinds of sexual abuses (polygamy, divorce, short term affairs en adultery, homosexual and lesbian relationships, prostitution, lover boys, escort services, nightclubs, pornography, rape and paedophilia) and all kinds of abuses on the internet (violence, porno, and fraud). Sinful culture includes: citizens who do not help strangers (minority groups), refugees (asylum seekers), the poor and handicapped; directors of large companies and banks that enrich themselves; and dangerous and irresponsible driving on the roads. People who are regulated by their human culture are most often broken down instead of being built up. Thus, the sinful aspects of every human culture mislead, destroy and turn people into animal behaviour.

Every human culture must also be converted and reform (transform) their sinful aspects to become conformed to the culture of the kingdom of God!

B. THE ETERNAL CULTURE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. The definition of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the absolute kingship (rule or sovereignty) of God through Jesus Christ over all people and everything. The kingdom of God is in particular the absolute kingship (rule or sovereignty) of God through Jesus Christ that is recognised in the hearts and operative in the lives of his people. It is based on Christ's completed work of salvation and the Spirit's application of that salvation. It results in four major changes.

- The complete salvation of believers from its beginning to its completion.
- Their establishment (constitution) of the Church (community of believers) on this present earth.
- The transformation of individual lives, families and societies on national and international level.
- A redeemed or completely renewed universe (the new heaven and the new earth).

2. The various aspects of the kingdom of God.

Discover and discuss. What are the various aspects of the kingdom of God?

- (1) The kingdom of God is God's sovereign rule recognised in the hearts and operative in all the spheres of the lives of his people.

Read Matthew 6:10,33; Matthew 13:31-35,44-46; Luke 17:21.

Notes. The parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value teach that the kingdom of God should be sought above all other endeavours and that it is always relevant. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast teach that the kingdom of God is penetrating everyone and everything. The kingdom of God overshadows all other things (tribes, national, political, ideological, theological and cultural allegiances). By comparing Matthew 13:31 with Mark 4:30 it becomes clear that "the kingdom of heaven" takes into account that "the kingdom of heaven" is the same as "the kingdom of God", because the Jews do not want to use the name of God in vain. They rather speak of "the One who lives in heaven".

- (2) God's sovereign kingship leads to the salvation of his people from its beginning to its completion.

Read Acts 8:12; 28:30-31; Mark 1:14-15; 10:25-26; John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Colossians 1:13.

Notes. The gospel is "the good news about the kingdom of God". The gospel therefore does not only speak of Christ's death and resurrection, repentance and faith, but also of God's rule in the hearts and lives of his people. Salvation begins when people repent and believe. This is called justification. Salvation continues throughout life as believers are

saved more and more from sinful thoughts, words and habits. This is called sanctification. And believers are finally saved from all sin and death. This is called glorification.

The kingdom of God came at the first coming of Christ (Matthew 12:28-29), is now a growing reality all over the world (Matthew 13:31-33), but will only become the complete and perfect kingdom of God at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 13:47-50; Matthew 25:34). Whoever repents and believes in Jesus Christ, enters the kingdom. To enter the kingdom is the same as to be born again (John 3:3), to be delivered from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13) or to be saved (Mark 10:23,26). The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 to 7 teaches that every aspect of life ought to be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ. All citizens of the kingdom of God ought to adopt the culture and lifestyle of the kingdom of God.

(3) God's sovereign kingship leads to the establishment of the Christian Church.

Read Matthew 16:18-19; John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:13,20-21; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Matthew 13:24-30.

Notes. The Christian Church is the visible community of people in in which Jesus Christ is acknowledged as King. The Christian Church is the community of people who have heard the gospel, believed in Christ and were sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Christian Church consists of God's chosen people. They have the calling and task to be kings, priests and prophets in the world. They have the calling to be the salt and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

The parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43) teaches that the kingdom of God (or the Christian Church) in its present form is a mixed community until the second coming of Christ. There will always be unbelievers and backsliders among the believers. Nevertheless, the believers should not allow the unbelievers to influence the life-style of the believers. Instead, the believers should influence the life-style of the unbelievers to become more and more the life-style of the kingdom of God (Jeremiah 15:19)! The believers should not let the world around them squeeze them into its own mould, but they should constantly allow God to re-make them what he intended them to be (Romans 12:1-2)!

(4) God's sovereign kingship leads to the transformation of individual people, families and societies in the world outside the Church.

Read Matthew 11:4-6; 25:31-40; Luke 3:10-14.

Notes. The activities of Christians within their families and societies have throughout history led to the establishment of schools and universities, clinics and hospitals, the caring of lepers and other outcasts, the helping of the blind, deaf and handicapped, the support of the poor and oppressed, the payment of taxes to the government, the resistance to extortion and corruption, the promotion of justice and righteousness, healthy ethics, values and norms in society, etc.

(5) God's sovereign kingship finally leads to a redeemed and transformed universe (the new heaven and the new earth).

Read Matthew 13:36-43; 25:31-34; Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:1-2,9-10,27.

Notes. At the second coming of Christ, he will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all people who do evil and throw them into the fiery furnace. Only the righteous people will live in the kingdom of God in its final perfect phase. Nothing impure, shameful or deceitful will ever enter it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27). The kingdom of God in its final phase is the renewal of everything. It is the new heaven and the new earth on which the heavenly Jerusalem descends as the New Jerusalem. This is nothing else than "the bride of the Lamb", that is, the Christian Church consisting of the full number of the redeemed who have ever lived (Romans 11:25-26).

The fact that, in the present time before the second coming of Christ, God's sovereign rule (kingship) often seems to be absent, does not mean that God is not the Almighty God. According to 2 Peter 3:9, God is exercising patience with the people on earth, because he wants them to come to repentance.

3. The characteristics of the kingdom of God.

Discover and discuss. What are the special characteristics of the kingdom of God?

(1) The kingdom of God has a present form and a future form.

Read Matthew 8:11-12; 12:28; 13:36-43; 19:14; 21:42-45.

Notes. In its present form, the kingdom of God is like Jesus Christ sowing the sons of the kingdom and the devil sowing the sons of the evil one in this present world (Matthew 13:36-39). The devil and the sons of the evil one are still present and active in the present form of the kingdom, but they will be completely removed in its future form!

In its present form, people from the west and the east are being set free from sin and evil spirits, and they are brought under the rule (kingship) of Christ through the preaching of the gospel (Matthew 12:28; Colossians 1:13). The kingdom is given to a people who will produce its fruit (Matthew 21:43). However, the descendants of God's people (nominal believers), who fail to receive the King, are thrown outside (Matthew 8:11-12).

In its future form, the angels will radical weed out all evil people and everything that causes sin from the kingdom of God and throw them into hell (Matthew 13:41)!

(2) The kingdom of God is at the same time a revelation and a mystery.

Read Matthew 13:11-17.

Notes. The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God is being revealed to those who open their hearts for the seed of the Word of God. But the kingdom of God remains a mystery to people who keep on hardening their hearts against Christ and the words of the Bible.

(3) The kingdom of God is in the present world, but not of the present world.

Read Luke 17:20-21; Matthew 5:19-20; John 18:36.

Notes. The kingdom of God is among us, in our hearts, practised and taught in our lives, and yet is not like any other kingdom in this world. It is not a kingdom with an earthly political government, a military defence or a religious kingdom organized by a man, but a kingdom ruled in a sovereign way by Jesus Christ from heaven.

(4) The kingdom of God begins small, but will finally pervade all (fill everything).

Read Matthew 13:31-33 and Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 2:34-35,44-45; Matthew 28:18.

Notes. The beginning of the kingdom of God was very small. But it develops gradually, not only in individual lives, but also in countries. The sovereign rule of God through Christ continually extends to more and more areas in the hearts of people and geographically in every country of this present world!

Finally after the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgement Day (Matthew 13:41; 25:31-46) the kingdom of God will pervade everything (fill everything) (Matthew 13:33). All in heaven and on earth will be brought under one Head, namely, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:10). Jesus Christ will fill everything in every way (Ephesians 1:23). The parable of the mustard seed and the yeast teach this. Every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God (Philippians 2:9-11). The kingdom of God will finally crush all other earthly kingdoms and bring them to an end (Daniel 2:44), but will itself never end (Isaiah 9:6). The kingdom of God endures forever!

C. THE RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE CHANGES IN YOUR CULTURE

Discover and discuss. Why do Christians have the responsibility to change the wrong or sinful aspects of their culture with respect to their own lives in so far it is possible?

1. Jesus Christ teaches Christians about the only perfect culture, the culture of the kingdom of God.

Read Matthew 5:1-16 (Matthew chapters 5 to 7).

Notes. During his sojourn on earth, Jesus taught very much about the kingdom of God! The only perfect culture in the world is the culture of the kingdom of the God of the Bible! The culture of the kingdom of God is revealed in the Bible and no-where else. The Bible reveals God's world-view, God's truths, what people *ought* to believe and what values people *ought* to have in every country of the world! It reveals which convictions people ought to have and which feelings and experiences are healthy in God's eyes. It reveals how people *ought* to behave, both in their personal lives as well as in their social relationships and institutions in every country of the world!

2. Jesus Christ commands Christians to promote the kingdom of God and the culture of the kingdom of God.

Read Genesis 1:28; 2:15; Matthew 6:10,33; 24:14.

Notes. Christians have the responsibility to seek God's kingdom above all else in their lives. They have the responsibility to pray for the coming of God's kingdom in the lives of other people and all nations in the world. They have the responsibility to preach God's kingdom to all the nations in the world!

Christians do not have the obligation to change the culture of their nation and neither do they have the power to do so. However, they have the responsibility to call the people in their culture to repent and be transformed in their personal lives. They make an appeal on people to change every wrong or sinful aspect in the culture of their country to become like the culture of the kingdom of God. Therefore, when they hear the gospel of the kingdom of God, people in every nation are called to repent and to change. They are called to change their world-view, their truths, their beliefs, their values, their convictions, their experiences, their behaviour, their relationships and their institutions to conform to the culture of the kingdom of God! Christ has come into the world to change individuals, families, communities and nations by changing their culture to become like the culture of the kingdom of God! Christ has come into the world to transform people and to transform their cultures through them! And he wants to begin with the wrong or sinful aspects of one's own culture in one's own life!

3. Jesus Christ will in a sovereign way transform Christians and the whole earth at the second coming.

Read Matthew 13:41-43; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19-21; 2 Peter 3:13; 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 21:24-27.

Notes. Jesus Christ will restore everything (Acts 3:21); he will make everything new (Revelation 21:5)! He will restore everything by weeding out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all people who do evil! He will not allow anything impure, shameful or deceitful to enter his kingdom in its final phase after the second coming. He will only

allow those things in human cultures into his kingdom in the New Jerusalem that are in total agreement with God's Word and glorify God. Nevertheless, like all individual Christians will only be made completely perfect by Christ at the second coming (1 John 3:1-3), so all good aspects of all human cultures will be made completely perfect only by Christ at his second coming (Romans 8:19-21).

D. EVALUATING ASPECTS OF YOUR CULTURE

Christians need to evaluate every aspect of their own culture in the light of the culture of the kingdom of God, as it is revealed in the Bible. Throughout your life, keep asking yourself the following questions:

- What is my present world-view in the light of the never-changing world-view of the Bible?
- What do I presently regard as truth in the light of the eternal truths in the Bible?
- What do I now believe in the light of all the things I ought to believe in the Bible?
- What are my present values and the values of my culture in the light of the values in the Bible that I ought to hold?
- What are my present convictions in the light of the convictions in the Bible that I ought to have?
- How does the Bible evaluate my feelings and experiences?
- How does the Bible evaluate my present relationships?
- What is my present behaviour in the light of the behaviour commanded in the Bible that I ought to have?
- How does the Bible evaluate the various political, judicial, educational, social and religious institutions in my culture?

See the two important studies:

Manual 6, supplement 7. The relationship to our living parents.

Manual 6, supplement 8. The relationship to our departed ancestors.

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.

Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. **Preach, teach or study the teaching** of "Human culture and the kingdom of God culture" together with another person or group of people. Teach new believers what the Bible teaches about the relationship to their living parents and to their departed ancestors. Make sure that what you believe is based on the Bible and not on fanciful speculation or false teaching.
3. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of 2 Timothy 2 - 4 each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. **Memorisation.** Review key verses in John. (6) John 5:24, (7) John 6:37, (8) John 7:38, (9) John 8:12, (10) John 10:28. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses from John.
5. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. John 10. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study.
6. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. **Update your notebook** on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.