

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 35

1	PRAYER
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Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

2	WORSHIP (20 minutes)	<i>[ATTITUDE EXPRESSED]</i> <i>GOD IS PRESENT (NEAR)</i>
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Meditation

Worship is to adore or to praise God.

Theme: The God of the Bible is present (near).

Read the following Bible passages.

Exodus 33:12-17; Romans 8:31-34.

Read or explain the following in your own words.

1. When God calls you to any task, do the following.

(1) Ask God to teach you his ways.

God must first teach you before you can teach others. Whatever God has taught to you, you can in your turn teach to other people. Especially let God teach you who he is, what his characteristics are, so that you may know God personally and intimately and so that you may continue to find favour with him (Exodus 33:12-13).

(2) Ask God to go with you.

Desire God's presence in your life and in your work.

Do not go out and do a task FOR God, but WITHOUT God!

Ask God to go WITH you and to work THROUGH you (Exodus 33:14-15).

2. God's presence is the distinguishing mark of Christians (Exodus 33:16).

The one thing that distinguishes the Christian leader and the Christian people from all other leaders and people in the world is the presence of the Living God (Matthew 28:20)!

- God is present when you confess your sin and receive his forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).
- God is present when you have quiet time and sit at his feet to learn from him (Luke 10:39).
- God is present when you do your daily work as if you do it for him (Colossians 3:17). "In the name of Jesus Christ" means speaking and doing things in complete dependence of his completed work of salvation, in complete dependence on his revealed will in the Bible and in complete dependence of his love, power, wisdom and presence.
- God is present when you ask him for guidance, wisdom, strength, help, etc. for whatever you undertake that day (Proverbs 3:5-6). Remember, undertaking anything without God is completely in vain. "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat – for he grants sleep to those he loves" (Psalm 127:1-2). But who remains in Jesus Christ, bears much fruit (John 15:5)!

So make every day of your life count by practising the presence and nearness of God in your daily life!

3. God's presence is the security of the Christian (Romans 8:31-34).

Paul says that if God is *for* Christians, who can be *against* them? God has set Christians free from the law of sin and death (from the dominating and controlling power of their sinful nature). Christians have been renewed by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them, who recognises them as his own children and heirs, and continually sanctifies them. Who can then be against a Christian (Romans 8:31)?

If God has done the greater, he will not leave the lesser undone! If God has completed his work of salvation through Jesus Christ FOR Christians, he will certainly complete his work of salvation and sanctification IN Christians and complete his work of service THROUGH Christians (Philippians 1:6)! If God in his eternal purpose gave his own Son, Jesus Christ, for Christians, he will certainly in time give to Christians everything they need for their complete salvation! God's infinite love for Christians cannot and will not fail Christians (Romans 8:32)!

If God has already condemned sin on the cross,
who will still condemn Christians
(Romans 8:33-34)?

Worship

Worship God for his continued presence. Worship in small groups of three people each.

3	SHARING (20 minutes) DEUTERONOMY 11:13-21; 13:1-5; 16:18-20; 17:14-20; 18:9-13; 18:14-22	<i>[QUIET TIMES]</i>
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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 (Deuteronomy 11:13-21; 13:1-5; 16:18-20; 17:14-20; 18:9-13; 18:14-22). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

4	TEACHING (70 minutes) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH	<i>[FELLOWSHIP]</i>
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A piece of coal can only keep on burning red-hot when it is surrounded by other red-hot pieces of coal. Likewise, in order to keep on growing and functioning, a Christian needs to be surrounded by other Christians (belong to a church). The Christian Community in the Bible is called “the Church”. The Church is the Body of Christ and cannot be separated from its Head, Jesus Christ.

Generally, denominations start to teach about the church from their own historical position (the history of their own denomination). However, all churches should teach what Jesus Christ and the apostles taught about the Church in the Bible! The Bible speaks of the Church as the ONE Body of Christ (one Church)! The Bible never speaks of “denominations”!

A. THE WORD “CHURCH” IN THE BIBLE

The word for “church” in English is derived from the Byzantine Greek word: “kuriakon” (belonging to the Lord). The church is “the Lord’s people.” The word for “church” in the original language of the New Testament (Greek) is “ekklésia”. It literally means “the ones called out” of the world by God. It has the following meanings in the Bible:

(1) Ekklésia means “the Church” of God in the Old Testament, led by “elders” (Psalm 107:32, assembly) (cf. Judges 20:2 assembly; Psalm 22:23 congregation; 2 Chronicles 29:28 assembly). Note that the words “Church” (Hebrew: qahal; Greek: ekklésia) and “council of elders” (Hebrew: moshab zekenim; Greek: presbuterion) have their origin in the Old Testament!

(2) Ekklésia means “the Church” of God in the New Testament when they meet together (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19; 3 John 6).

(3) Ekklésia means “the house church”, the Christians that meet together in a house (Romans 16:5).

(4) Ekklésia means “the independent congregation”, the total of Christians in one place (Matthew 18:17): for example, Jerusalem (Acts 8:1); Judea, Galilee, Samaria (Acts 9:31) (cf. Acts 15:41; Galatians 1:22; Revelation 1:12-13,20).

(5) Ekklésia means “the universal or worldwide¹ Church, “the Body of Christ”, to which all independent churches/congregations and Christians in the world belong (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:21-22; 3:10; 5:22-33). The Church is the one flock of the one Shepherd that is gathered together from the many different sheep pens (nations) in the world (John 10:16).

B. THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The apostles of Jesus Christ used different pictures in the New Testament to describe what the Christian Church is and how she should function. These pictures teach *the nature* of the Christian Church. The nature of the Church influences *the functions and the forms* of the Church.

1. Picture 1. The Christian Church is a spiritual community and not a building of bricks.

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5; Ephesians 2:21-22; (Acts 17:24-25; 1 Corinthians 3:6-11).

(1) A spiritual building.

The Church is never *a material building or material place* (a church building) where Christians meet (Acts 17:24-25), but always is a spiritual community, a group of living people in whom God through his Spirit lives (Ephesians 2:22). That is why the Church is “a spiritual house” (Greek: oikos), “a building” or “temple” separated from worldly purposes and dedicated to spiritual purposes (holy) (Ephesians 2:21). The Church is built up with “living stones” (the believers) (1 Peter 2:5).

¹ Greek: katholikos. Thus the word “catholic” does NOT mean Roman Catholic, but means “universal” or “worldwide”. All Christians in the world belong to the “worldwide Church”. The Roman Catholic Church is nothing more than a denomination (one of the many human organizations within the one Body of Christ)!

(2) A spiritual foundation.

The “foundation” of this spiritual house consists of the apostles of Jesus Christ (including Paul) and the prophets (preachers) in the first century B.C. (Acts 15:3,22). Jesus Christ is “the Cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-8). These apostles and prophets were the historical eyewitnesses and ear-witnesses of Jesus Christ and have no successors! Together with the New Testament prophets (preachers) these apostles proclaimed the gospel, made disciples and planted new independent churches in Judea, Samaria, Galilee and to the ends of the Roman Empire (Acts 1:8; 9:31; 14:21-23) Christians must know how to behave in “God’s household (Greek: oikos), which is the Church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15).

2. Picture 2. The Christian Church is a family or household, and not a company.

Read 1 Timothy 3:14-15; Ephesians 2:19; (Ephesians 3:14-15).

(1) The Church is a family or household.

The Church consists of “members of God’s household” (Greek: oikeioi) (Ephesians 2:19). The church is also called “the family” (Greek: patria) of God in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 3:15).

(2) You become a member through rebirth.

People can bind themselves to a company when they possess certain qualifications and are hired by signing a contract in which their tasks and salary are recorded. But people can only become bound to the family of God by God’s undeserved grace and their rebirth through the Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

(3) Relationships are important.

In a company the employer relates to his employees as the boss and the employees relate to one another as colleagues. But in the Church God relates as “the Father” to his “children”, they relate to one another as “a family” and the family members are “brothers and sisters” of each other (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

(4) The goal is to love one another.

In a company the most important value is “what you do” (your performance, achievement, production). But in the Church the most important value is “who you are” (your relationships and loving one another).

3. Picture 3. The Christian Church is a living organism, a living body and not simply an organisation.

Read Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 4:16; Acts 15:28; (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 2:14-15).

(1) The Church is an organism.

The Church is “the Body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23) or “the one new man” (Ephesians 2:15). The Church should not simply function as an organisation, but as a living organism. A living organism is an organised body with connected, interdependent parts that share a common life.

(2) The Head and the management of the Church.

An organisation is governed by an ordinary human being (a president, chairman or director). But the worldwide Church is governed by its Head, Jesus Christ himself (Ephesians 1:22-23)². An organisation is directed from the outside by man-made goals, policies and regulations. But the Christian Body is directed from the inside by the divine goals delineated in the Bible and through the Holy Spirit who lives in Christians (Ephesians 2:22) and works these goals out in their lives and in the Church.

An organisation has limited and specialised objectives (one kind of sport or one product), but the Church is involved in every area and concerned with every aspect of life (Ephesians 1:9-10; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). It is concerned with spiritual life and ordinary (social, intellectual and emotional) life, with truth and justice, with families and society, with life in the present as well as with life in the future.

(3) The members of the Church.

A person becomes a member of an organisation by joining the organisation, but a person becomes a member of the Church by “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” (rebirth) (1 Corinthians 12:13). The members of an organisation are temporarily registered on paper, but the members of the Church are forever registered “in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23) and their membership is “sealed” (guaranteed for ever) by the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). The membership of an organisation corresponds to “the present Jerusalem that is in slavery with her children” on earth, but the members of the Church have as their “mother the Jerusalem that is above and her children are free” (Galatians 4:25-26). Thus, the members of an organisation only have a formal and very vulnerable bond with a historical denomination, a human leader and with each other, but the members of a genuine congregation have an unbreakable bond with Christ, the worldwide Body of Christ and other genuinely transformed believers.

² And therefore NOT by a pope, cardinal, patriarch, metropolitan, archbishop, bishop, priest, minister or pastor!

(4) The culture of the Church.

An organisation often remains static and cumbersome due to its human traditions and cultural forms. The members of an organisation tend to hold on to uniformity: they tend to hold the same views and traditions, speak and behave in the same way and are adverse to participate in new or different activities. They prefer that everyone would think alike, act alike and enjoy the same things (even wear the same clothing and follow the same liturgy). But the genuine Church continually grows and renews itself (Ephesians 4:16) by letting go of unbiblical traditions (Mark 7:1-16) and instead accepting the culture of the kingdom of God (Matthew 5 to 7), holding on to the truth, building itself up and loving one another (Ephesians 4:15-16). The members of the genuine Church embrace and enhance diversity (multiformity). In the Body of Christ there is a great diversity of people (often from different human cultures), of spiritual gifts, of tasks (ministries, services) and of workings (manifestations of the Spirit) (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

(5) Decision-making in the Church.

In an organisation decisions are often made by an autocratic manager or director or by voting democratically. But in the genuine Church decisions must always be based on the correct interpretation of the Bible and as far as possible on unanimity (consensus, mutual agreement) (Acts 15:28): unity of the Christian Faith (Ephesians 4:13)³, being likeminded, one in spirit and purpose (Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2-4). An organisation is “autocratic” (ruled by one person), or aristocratic (ruled by a small group of important leaders, for example: bishops), or “democratic” (ruled by the people), but the Church is “theocratic” (ruled by God) or “Christocratic” (ruled by Christ)!

4. Picture 4. The Christian Church is “a flock of sheep” led by shepherds and not a herd of cattle driven by cowboys.

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Peter 2:25.

(1) The flock belongs to God.

A Church is never the possession of any denomination, but belongs solely to God – it is “the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). Jesus Christ bought every Christian with his own precious blood (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28).

(2) The flock should be led by shepherds.

The Church is led by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Shepherd (Pastor) and Overseer (Bishop) of souls, the Chief-Shepherd of the Church. The elders are only under-shepherds who follow the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-3).

(3) The flock follows the shepherds willingly.

The members follow the elders willingly. In most parts of the world herds of cattle are driven forward by cowboys who shout and flick their whips. But flocks of sheep have shepherds that walk in front and they follow the shepherds willingly. Likewise, the Church should not be a herd of cattle driven and forced by the leaders to go a particular (dogmatic, national or cultural) direction. The Church is a flock of sheep that follows the under-shepherds (elders) willingly and wholeheartedly, because the under-shepherds follow the Chief-Shepherd (*Read* Ezekiel 34:1-24).

5. Picture 5. The Christian Church is an inclusive international body and not an exclusive national body.

Read. 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 5:9-10; (Ephesians 2:14-19).

(1) The international people: a chosen nation among the other nations.

The Church is “a chosen nation”, “a holy nation”, “a people belonging to God, that once was not a people, but now is the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9-10), that comes from every natural nation on earth. Christians should not regard the Church as a national fellowship that excludes people from other nationalities. Christians should also not regard the Church (their congregation) as a denomination, because it excludes other true Christians from its community.

Christians may not choose who belongs to the Church. It is God himself who chooses people from every tribe, language, people and nation on earth (Revelation 5:9-10) to belong to his Kingdom, his people or his Church (2 Thessalonians 1:1). It is forbidden to refuse people from other nations to become members of the Church (or your congregation) (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Every local congregation ought to admit people from different nations and cultures in their neighbourhood into their congregation. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has broken down “the wall of hostility” that divided the Jewish and Greek members of the Church (Ephesians 2:13-15)!

(2) The international kingdom.

The Church is “a royal priesthood” (a Kingdom of priests) (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). The Christian Church (Community) is the visible manifestation of God’s Kingdom in its present form on earth (Matthew 13:36-43; Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 21:42-44).

³ Objective Genitive

6. Picture 6. The Christian Church is in the present time a bride who is not yet perfect, but makes herself ready for the wedding (the perfect reality).

Read Galatians 4:21-31; Revelation 19:5-10; Revelation 21:1-2,9-10; Matthew 13:24-30,36-43.

The Church is now still “the Bride of Christ” (Ephesians 5:32), but at the second coming of Christ will become “the wife of Christ” (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10).

(1) The Church is the Heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:21-31) that is prepared to become the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 10:8-10; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 13:14).

“The slave woman (Hagar)” represents the community that lives according to the covenant of the Law. This is especially the ceremonial law of Moses, which God added 645 years after the covenant of Promise and grace and to which the Jewish teachers and Pharisees had later added 613 human laws. Hagar bears children that are enslaved by the Law. She is the picture of people⁴ who still try to be justified by keeping the Law. The citizens of the present earthly city of Jerusalem are people that are enslaved by the Law.

“The free woman (Sarah)” represents the community that lives according to the covenant of the promise or the covenant of grace. Sarah bears children that are freed by Jesus Christ. She is the picture of people that are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and born-again by the Holy Spirit. The citizens of the present Heavenly Jerusalem are only believers in Jesus Christ, whether they believed in the Messiah that during the Old Testament period still had to come (Isaiah 53:4-6; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 11:8-10,13-16) or believe in Christ that during the New Testament period had already come (Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 13:14). Many believers in Jesus Christ still dwell on earth in the present time and have the Heavenly Jerusalem as their “mother” (cf. Philippians 3:20). All believers in Jesus Christ that have already died are presently with Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24).

(2) The Church is the Bride of Christ who prepares herself for the wedding of the Lamb (Revelation 19:5-10; 21:1-2,9-10).

Until the second coming of Christ, Christ is occupied with sanctifying his Bride through the Word (Ephesians 5:25-27). He is making her perfect in being and complete in number (Greek: pléroma) (Ephesians 1:23; cf. Romans 11:25-26).

But also the Bride (the Church) is “making herself ready for the wedding of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7) through a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). Only at the second coming of Christ will the Church be complete in number (Romans 11:25-26) and perfect in being (Ephesians 5:26-27; 1 John 3:1-3; Philippians 3:21). Only then will the number of all the Jews who in history have become believers in Jesus Christ (“the fullness of Israel” or “all Israel”) be complete. And only then will the number of all the Gentiles who in history have become believers Jesus Christ (“the fullness of the Gentiles”) be complete (Romans 11:25-26). Thus, the Church in its present form is not yet complete in number and also not perfect in being (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

There is but one Body of Christ, one worldwide Church (Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 9:31) and it consists of all churches (congregations) in the world and throughout the history of the world. These churches (congregations) are under the leadership of Jesus Christ through his Spirit, his Word (the Bible) and the council of elders of each church (congregation) which the Spirit appointed to be the overseers (bishops) and shepherds (pastors) of that church (congregation) (thus independent from the rule by other churches or other leaders). But the churches (congregations) are in all other aspects mutually dependent on each other in a biblical way, should have the same teachings (1 Corinthians 4:17), rules (1 Corinthians 7:17) and practices (1 Corinthians 11:16; 1 Corinthians 14:33) and should strive towards the same culture of the kingdom of God (Matthew 5 to 7). The members of the Church are *registered in heaven* (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:23a). Registration on earth is advisable for the sake of an orderly organisation, but is not compulsory and certainly does not point to membership of the Body of Christ.

The Church consists of all in heaven: God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, all angels and all believers in the Old and New Testaments that have already died (Ephesians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 Hebrews 11:10,16; Hebrews 12:22-24) and all Christians who still live on earth, but are registered in heaven. Christians today are looking for “the city that is to come”, that is, to the second coming of Christ when the Church will be completely prepared and ready to be the Bride of the Lamb (Hebrews 13:14).

The wedding of the Lamb will take place at the second coming of Christ when God through Christ will make all things new and will dwell together with his peoples (the believers from all nations) on the new earth (Revelation 21:3-5). Only then will the Church be complete in number and perfect in being.

(3) The Church consists of the Militant Church on earth and at the same time of the Triumphant Church in heaven.

The present Christian Community still consists of “the Militant Church on earth” (Matthew 16:18-19; Ephesians 6:10-18; Hebrews 11:9-10,13; Hebrews 12:1-3; Hebrews 13:13-14; Revelation 12:10-12) and at the same time of “the

⁴ Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Triumphant Church in heaven” (Ephesians 3:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Hebrews 11:10,14-16; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 13:14).

But at the second coming of Christ, the wedding of the Lamb will take place and “the Heavenly Jerusalem” will come down from heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16) and the sky, where the Last Judgement has taken place, on to the new earth as “the New Jerusalem” or “the bride or the wife of the Lamb” (Revelation 21:1-2,9-10). Then the Church will no longer be the Militant Church, but only “the Triumphant Church”. Then the Church will be “complete in number and perfect in Being” (1 John 3:1-3). Then the almighty God and his Lamb will dwell with his people on the new earth. Then he will abolish death, mourning, pain and the whole old order that still exists now on the present earth. Then he will make everything new (Revelation 21:3-5).

(4) The Church is at present the imperfect Church of God that will become the perfect Church of God at the second coming (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

Before the second coming of Christ, the present Christian Church, as a part of the kingdom of God in its present form, is a mixed community consisting of true Christians (the wheat) and nominal Christians or non-Christian⁵ (the weeds). True Christians are not yet complete in number nor perfect in being, but are still growing towards spiritual and moral maturity. Nominal Christians often look very much like real Christians, but in their hearts and lives they are not born-again.

For example, nominal Christians are symbolically like “bad fruit” (Matthew 7:16-10) or “chaff” (Matthew 3:10-12) or “weeds” that look like wheat (Matthew 13:24-30,47). They speak and act at first sight as if they are real Christians (Matthew 7:21-22). Nevertheless, they are “withered branches” that look as if they belong to the Vine (John 15:6). They are members of the flock that are “savage wolves” that do not spare the flock, but arise in order to distort the truth and draw disciples away after them (Acts 20:29-31). They are “false apostles” that preach a different Jesus, possess a different spirit (not the Holy Spirit)(cf. 1 Corinthians 14:12) and proclaim a different gospel than the gospel found in the Bible (2 Corinthians 11:4,13-15). They are “false brothers” that infiltrate the Church in order to distort the truth (Galatians 1:6-9; Galatians 2:4-5).

Nominal Christians are people that may once have been enlightened (that is, may have been baptised with water), may have participated in the Lord’s Supper (Eucharist in Roman Catholic Church), may have often heard the preaching of God’s Word, may have seen God’s powerful deeds in their midst (in short: may have had a share in what the Holy Spirit was doing in the congregation) and yet fall away afterwards. They crucify Jesus all over again and subject Jesus to public shame. When their lives continue to produce worthless thorns and thistles they are in danger of being cursed. They show what they always have been: not a real living branch, but a dry and dead branch. In the end they will be burned (Hebrews 6:4-8). Only when such people are genuinely born-again will they be completely forgiven (Hebrews 8:10-12).

But at the second coming of Christ, these unregenerate people, the other wicked people and everything that causes sin will be weeded out of his kingdom and thrown into hell (Matthew 13:36-43,48-50; Matthew 25:31-33; cf. John 15:6). Then the final visible manifestation of the Christian Church will be “the kingdom of God in its final form or phase on the new earth” (Matthew 25:34; Revelation 11:15).

C. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Bible teaches that there is only one Body of Christ. There is only one universal or worldwide Christian Church!⁶

1. Jesus Christ is the Saviour and Lord of the worldwide Church.

Read Acts 20:28; (1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 6:20).

The Christian Church (Community) does not belong to any human being (for example: the founder), a specific leader (the pastor), or a particular organisation (for example: a denomination). The Church belongs only to Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ calls the Church “my Church” (Matthew 16:18) and God bought the Church with his own (i.e. Christ’s) blood from every nation in the world (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

2. Jesus Christ is the Founder and Builder of the worldwide Church.

Read Matthew 16:18-19

The Church was not founded or built by a man (a church planter) or by a human institution (a denomination), but by Jesus Christ! He says that he is building his Church on “the rock” (Greek: *petra*, a play on words with the name *Petros*) (Matthew 16:18). Jesus used the apostle Peter (Greek: *petros*) (his name means “rock”) and his preaching of the kingdom of God to found the first churches among the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Acts 2,8,10). The apostles of Jesus Christ and the New Testament prophets (preachers in the Early Church) formed the historical foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20).

⁵ Seekers

⁶ Greek: *katholikos* means: “worldwide” (and is thus not the same as “Roman Catholic”).

The authority which was given to Peter in Matthew 16:19, was given to the Twelve Apostles in Matthew 18:18 (John 20:23). The local church has a part in the exercise of this authority (especially through the inclusion or exclusion of people from the church) (Matthew 18:17; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 1 Corinthians 6:4).

3. Jesus Christ is the Head and Overseer (Bishop) of the worldwide Church.

Read Colossians 1:17-18; 1 Peter 2:25; (1 Peter 5:4).

The Church does not have a human being (for example: a pope, a bishop, a pastor, a leader) or a human institution (for example a Council, a Synod) as her head. Jesus Christ only is “the Head” (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18a). Jesus Christ was appointed by God the Father himself as the One “people must listen to” (Matthew 17:5; cf. Acts 3:22-23)!

Jesus Christ is “the Apostle” and “the High Priest” of the faith we confess (Hebrews 3:1), “the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) and “the Overseer (Bishop)” (1 Peter 2:25) of the worldwide Church!⁷ No earthly pastor, minister, bishop, cardinal, pope, patriarch, apostle or prophet may ever take the place of Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ exercises his authority as Head of the worldwide Church through:

- the Bible (correctly interpreted)
- the Holy Spirit (who never opposes the Bible)
- the council of elders of the local church (1 Timothy 4:14).

The Bible teaches nothing about Worldwide Councils, General Synods or Church Conferences. The highest authority is found on the local level with Christ by means of his Word (the Bible), his Spirit and the council of elders of the local church.

Jesus Christ is not only the Head of the Church, but also the Head of the universe (Ephesians 1:10,22)! The universe in all its parts is completely dependent on Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus Christ governs the universe in the interest of the Church! Jesus Christ is also the Head of every cosmic power and no area in the universe is outside his sovereign control (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:21; 1 Peter 3:22).

4. The Church is the Body and the Fullness of Christ.

Read Ephesians 1:22-23.

The Church is not a part of any human organisation (a denomination), but is “the fullness” of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:23). The relationship between Christ and the Church is “a profound mystery” (Ephesians 5:31-32). Just as the bride is “the complement” of the groom and forms a fullness, a whole together with the groom, one organic unity (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6), likewise the worldwide Church is “the complement” of Christ and forms a fullness, a whole together with Christ, one organic unity (not physical, but spiritual). The Head (Christ) and the Body (the Church) form a fullness, a whole. The Body of Christ consists of all independent local churches (congregations), Christian organisations (Roman Catholic orders) and individual Christians everywhere in the world, which is much more than any church denomination! Not a single church denomination may claim to be the one and only true Church of Christ!

The Body (the worldwide Church) carries out the will, and purpose of the Head (Christ) as it is revealed in the Bible! The Church has not been called to carry out the will and purpose of a man (for example: a pastor, bishop or apostle, etc.) or of an umbrella organisation (Council, Synod, Conference, Church denomination), etc.). Jesus Christ uses the Church to realise his will, goals and plans in the history of the world, namely, to save people, to make them disciples of Christ, to help them to grow and to be sanctified and to establish and enlarge his kingdom (kingship) and righteousness everywhere on earth. His kingdom (kingship) is first established “within Christians” (Luke 17:21-22), then “in the world” (Matthew 12:28) but not “of the world” (John 18:36-37), and finally it will comprise “the whole renewed earth and universe” (Matthew 25:34; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19-22; Revelation 21:1-5).

5. The Church should always only glorify God in Christ.

Read Ephesians 3:21.

The Church may not glorify a particular person (for example, a leader or a person declared to be “a saint”) or a human institution (for example, a particular denomination, Christian organisation or order), but must always glorify God through Christ alone (Ephesians 3:21; John 16:14). God says, “I will not give my glory to another” (whether “the god” of another religion, an idol or any man) (Isaiah 42:8; Isaiah 48:11). The goal of the worldwide Church is: “Soli Deo Gloria” (To God alone the glory!) “From him, through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen! (Romans 11:36)!

D. HOW THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (COMMUNITY) IS BEING BUILD UP.

The Christian Church does not remain static or unchanged. She grows in spiritual quality and in numerical quantity. Her growth in quality is the indispensable prerequisite for her growth in quantity. The Christian Church is built up by every

⁷ Greek: kephalé (head), apostolos (apostle), archiereus (high priest), poimén (shepherd), episkopos (bishop) of the worldwide (Greek: katholikos > catholic)(NOT Roman Catholic) Church.

Christian serving, by the growing unity and love in the relationships among Christians and by the ever-increasing maturity of Christians.

1. The Church grows in quantity through evangelism among non-Christians.

Read Acts 20:20-27; Ephesians 3:6-12.

The Christian Church grows in quantity by evangelising non-believers and non-Christians. The followers of Christ proclaim the message of God's grace and declare to all people that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in Jesus Christ. They proclaim the kingdom (kingship) of God, the whole will (plan) of God (Acts 20:27), the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8) and the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). No one is born a Christian. Everyone must be born again (John 3:3-8)! Without rebirth, no one becomes a genuine member of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Without faith in Jesus Christ, no one will be saved (John 3:16,18,36; John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

2. The Church grows in quality through making Christians disciples of Christ.

Read Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 4:11-16.

The Christian Church grows in quality by establishing all believers to become mature, functioning and persevering Christians. This is called "making disciples". (Matthew 28:19-20). Disciples are generally made by mature Christians helping other Christians to fulfil "the one another responsibilities" (for example, to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to encourage one another, etc). The objective of making disciples is not to turn new Christians into members of some denomination, but to make them disciples of Christ! They spur them on to deepen their personal relationship with Christ through Word and prayer, to be actively involved in the Church, to have influence on people outside the Church, to obey Christ and his Word, and to develop a Christ like character. The measure of maturity is Christ likeness (Ephesians 4:13).

Some visible results of maturity are:

- unity on the basis of the teachings of the Bible (the Christian Faith) and on the basis of knowing Christ personally as Saviour and Lord and fellowshiping with him every day (Ephesians 4:13)
- stability and discernment of the truth (Ephesians 4:14; Romans 6:17; Titus 1:9)
- and love in all relationships (Ephesians 4:15).

A pitfall for the Christian Church is to depart from the truth as it has been revealed in the Bible and to make a compromise with the lie, whether in beliefs, words or deeds. Another pitfall for the Christian Church is to be coldly indifferent to the thoughts and feelings, trials and interests of non-Christians (the people outside the Church whom Christians try to win for Christ).

3. The Church grows in quantity and quality through equipping Christians to become labourers.

Read Mark 13:34; Ephesians 4:12,16.

The Christian Church is being build up by equipping the followers of Christ for works of service in the local church or in the worldwide Church. The word "to equip"⁸ means "to restore" (to their original purpose), "to make complete", "to train", "to equip". Equipping is usually done by those specially gifted in that area (Ephesians 4:11) and not necessarily by the elders of the congregation.

The Christians are equipped to do the many different services in the local church as well as in the worldwide Christian Church. For example, some Christians are equipped to evangelise, to do follow-up, to make disciples, or to show mercy. Other Christians are equipped to lead, to preach or to teach God's Word, No member of the Christian Church should just passively attend meetings. Eventually, every Christian should function in the task that Christ has assigned to him (1 Corinthians 3:5; Mark 13:34).

E. THE FUNCTIONS AND FORMS IN THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH

1. Uniformity and diversity in the Church.

Although there is but one Body of Christ, it consists of a great number of local churches (congregations)⁹ and individual members (Christians) (1 Corinthians 12:12). To each Christian grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (Ephesians 4:7). This grace may consist of the following:

- one of the great variety of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4)
- one of the great variety of tasks (services) (1 Corinthians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:5,28; Mark 13:34)
- one of the great variety of workings or manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:6-7)
- one of the many places (1 Corinthians 12:18) within the worldwide Church!

⁸ Greek: katartismos (Ephesians 4:12); katartizó (Luke 6:40; Hebrews 13:21); exartizó (2 Timothy 3:17)

⁹ The Bible never speaks of "church denominations", like the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholics Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Independent Church, the Chinese Church, etc.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Church is not that Christians are all the same and do all the same things (uniformity), but precisely that they are all unique and different and are able to do different things (diversity) (1 Corinthians 12:14-20). If every Christian wanted to be the leader, who would then show mercy? If every Christian would be able to do the same thing, this would lead to tension and disunity. Many Christians would feel superfluous and worthless. Diversity leads to greater unity, because the service of each Christian is necessary for other people. A church can only do what it should, when she gives room for the great diversity of her members.

The members of a church are like the members of a body mutually dependent. No one should feel superior or inferior. Because the eye needs the ear and the hand needs the foot. Every Christian is important and needed. Every member is necessary for the good functioning of the church.

Every Christian has receives authority from God to exercise his responsibility. For example, leadership in the church is not a position, but a function (an office with a limited responsibility and a matching authority).

The members ought to take care of one another (*Read* 1 Corinthians 12:21-27), love one another, carry one another's burdens and encourage one another. Also the elders must watch over one another (Acts 20:28). Christians also have responsibilities towards Christians in other local congregations in the world (2 Corinthians 8-9). Every Christian is important in the eyes of Jesus Christ!

2. Traditional and contemporary forms in the Church.

Christians pray in different ways, conduct their services in different ways, teach the Bible in different ways, baptise people in different ways and celebrate the Lord's Supper in different ways. However, the traditional ways or forms to carry out Christian functions may never become inflexible forms, rules or regulations. Jesus Christ condemns all human religious "traditions or traditional forms that have nullified the Word of God". He teaches that such traditions are completely useless, because "they are rules taught by men". For example, the Pharisees in the time of Jesus Christ had turned certain "forms" into "compulsory traditions". They had turned the washing of hands before the meal into compulsory requirements for all Jews (*Read* Matthew 15:1-9). Jesus condemns forms that are kept on just for the show (Matthew 23:25-29)!

Although in practice all Christian functions are expressed in some kind of form, all these forms must clearly express the biblical teaching and function, must have real meaning and must be expressed sincerely. The form in which a function is expressed must never become more important than the content of the function or the reason why something is done (for example, "the form or method of baptism with water" may never become more important than "the meaning of baptism"). No form may be turned into a fixed rule or regulation. Every form must be tested again and again to see whether it still expresses the Word of God (Mark 7:1-13).

A congregation needs to express all biblical functions in biblical and contemporary forms or ways.

- The first local church in Jerusalem practically expressed their fellowship (a function) by meeting every day in the temple (a form) (Acts 2:42,46).
- The way they celebrated the Lord's Supper (a function) was to combine it with an ordinary meal (a form) (Acts 2:42,46; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22).
- The way they gave their gifts (a function) was that some sold some of their property and gave the proceeds to the poor (a form) (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:34-35).
- They baptised with water (a function), sometimes outside in some water in which they could stand (a form) (Acts 8:36-39a) and sometimes inside a house where water was poured on and over a person standing (another form) (Acts 9:17-18; Acts 22:16; cf. Acts 2:17; Titus 3:5).
- And they prayed (a function) as Jews do with uplifted arms (a form) (1 Timothy 2:8; Psalm 134:2) or by kneeling (another form)(Acts 20:36; Ephesians 3:14).

But note, nowhere in the Bible is the Church required or commanded to express all the biblical functions in the same prescribed way! Christians may express these functions in contemporary forms that fit this present time. For example, Christians not only sing biblical psalms, but also compose new spiritual songs and make music with different contemporary musical instruments (Psalm 33:3; 150:3-6; Ephesians 5:19).

F. THE MANY LOCAL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES (CONGREGATIONS) WITHIN THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH

1. How the local churches came into existence.

The Church is the Body of Christ. It manifests itself in the many local Christian churches (congregations, fellowships). The local churches are the historical result of:

- on the one hand the sovereign intervention of God
- and on the other hand the obedience of Christians to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19.

For example:

(1) Acts 2.

- God poured his Holy Spirit out on his disciples on the Day of Pentecost
- and the apostle Peter preached the gospel.

As a result, the first congregation among the Jews was planted in Jerusalem (A.D. 30).

(2) Acts 8.

- God allowed a great persecution against the followers of Christ in Jerusalem that scattered them (A.D. 33/34).
- The scattered Christians preached the gospel wherever they went.

As a result local churches were also planted among the Samaritans (Acts 9:31).

(3) Acts 10.

- God gave visions to a Gentile military officer (Cornelius) and to the apostle Peter on a rooftop.
- Then Peter went to the Gentiles and preached the gospel to them.

As a result the first congregation among the Gentiles was planted in Caesarea (A.D. 40).

(4) Acts 11.

- God's hand was with the followers of Christ who had been scattered by the great persecution.
- They began to preach the gospel to Gentiles in foreign countries.

As a result a large congregation was planted among the Gentiles in Antioch (Syria) in a neighbour country (A.D. 44).

(5) Acts 13-14.

- God called, set apart and sent out Paul and Barnabas
- Paul made three missionary journeys (A.D. 47-48, A.D. 50-52 and A.D. 52-57) they made disciples in every city they came.

As a result congregations were planted in the Middle East.

(6) Acts 16-20.

- Through the Holy Spirit God closed and opened new doors to found new congregations
- and guided the missionary team to where they should go and where they should not go.

As a result local churches were planted in Turkey, Macedonia, Greece, Illyricum, Italy and possibly Spain in European countries. God directly commanded and encouraged Paul to stay in a particular place and teach God's Word for a longer time (Acts 18).

2. How the local churches functioned.

Read Acts 2:42-44; Acts 5:15-16,42.

The basic activities of a local congregation in the beginning were:

(1) To gather.

The local Christians in every place gathered together regularly for worship and prayer, teaching and preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and for fellowship with one another and service towards others.

(2) To scatter.

The local church scattered into their neighbourhood, into the streets and houses, and even to the neighbouring towns to preach, teach and to heal.

3. How the local churches were led.

Read 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 4:14; (Acts 14:21-23; Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

The book of Acts, written by Luke, as well as the letters of Paul and Peter teach unanimously that the local congregation should be led by a group of elders (Greek: presbyteroi)(Acts 14:23), called "a body or council of elders" (Greek: presbuterion) (1 Timothy 4:14).

The required qualifications, prescribed tasks and limited authority of the elders are not to be determined by any human being, human organisation or any human culture, but are clearly taught in the Bible! Also the way elders should lead has been prescribed in the Bible (1 Timothy 3:14-15). Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter clearly teach that a leader may never lord it over the people entrusted to his care (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:2-3). No one may change these Biblical instructions.

4. Where the local churches conducted their meetings.

Read Acts 5:42; Acts 12:5,12; (Acts 10:24,27; Philemon 1:1-2).

The congregations that are described in the New Testament conducted most of their meetings in the houses of Christians. The congregations were "house fellowships (house churches)"! They met in houses for the regular worship service, teaching, preaching, praying, evangelism, baptism, the Lord's Supper and for equipment of workers (Acts 18:26). Even today, in many places of the world, congregations still meet in houses, because the Christians in those places are persecuted and because it is also much more affordable.

See also:

Manual 3. Supplement 12

Manual 3. Supplement 13

Manual 3. Supplement 14

Fellowship. The word “church” in the Bible.

Fellowship. Function and form in the Church

Fellowship. The Church as the Body of Christ is indispensable

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<i>[REACTIONS]</i> PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group **to pray short** (in one or two sentences) 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 (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	<i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i> 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. Preach, teach or study the teaching of “The characteristics of the Christian Church” together with another person or group of people.
2. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Deuteronomy 28:1 – 31:13 each day. Make use of the questions method of quiet time. Make notes.
3. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. (6) 1 Corinthians 12:4-7,12-28. Theme: Christians live and function as a body in the Church. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
4. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. **Update your notebook** on making disciples. Include the worship notes and teaching notes and this preparation.