

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will do Bible study together about one important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We will use a very easy Bible study method called the five steps method. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. The third series of 5 Bible studies is about the church. The topics are: “The cultural task of the church”, “The missionary task of the church”, “The evangelistic task of the church”, “The goals of the church” and “The leadership of the church”. Today’s Bible study is: A DISCIPLE IS OCCUPIED WITH THE CULTURAL TASK OF THE CHURCH.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Please read Genesis 1:24 – 2:3 or yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in this Bible passage. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in Genesis 1:27, which says, “God created man in his own image, ... male and female he created them.” God created both the man and the woman in his image. First. The specific characteristics of both the man and the woman are needed to express the personality of God. Second. I am very different than the animals, birds and reptiles, because they do not have the image of God. As an image of God, I have been given the same characteristic features that God possesses. This truth helps me to understand myself, to respect how wonderful I am created and to have a healthy self-esteem.

(T) An important truth for me is in Genesis 1:28, which says, “God blessed them and said to them.” This is the first time in the Bible that God directly addresses the man and the woman. God only spoke a blessing *over* the creation and animals, but God spoke his blessing directly *to* the man and the woman. This is the very first revelation of God to man. In it God gives to man a blessing, his task and his destiny. This clearly shows that there is a great difference between man and animals. God created me for a specific task. I am created to have a personal relationship with God, with other people and with nature. With regard to God, I must bear his image in a worthy way. With regard to other people, I must respect the difference between male and female. With regard to nature, I must subdue it and rule over it.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in this passage and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1<sup>st</sup> Question. What makes a human being different from any other creature?

(T) Three things make a human being different from any other creature. First. The human body. Genesis 2:7 says that God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into man, and man became a living being. While God formed animals by his creative command, he formed man by his own hands and breath of life. This shows that the human body is very special and has a very special destiny. Two. The human spirit. Genesis 1:26-27 says that God made man in his own image or likeness. Man was given a spiritual nature that corresponds to God’s spiritual nature. He possessed the real and characteristic spiritual features of God. He was in another degree a copy of God’s personality. In this respect, man is unique in creation. Nothing in creation besides man bears the image of God! Three. The human relationship with God. Genesis 1:28-29 says that God spoke directly to man. This is the very first revelation of God to man! This means that man has the ability to know God and to communicate with God. Moreover, God gave man the task to subdue the earth, to rule over all living creatures and to utilise all plants and trees. God thus reveals that he created the earth *for man* and made man *the steward of his creation*.

In summary. Man has a physical and a spiritual existence, or in short, man has a body and a spirit. Only man can think rationally, has a conscience that can distinguish between right and wrong, has intuition that can know without reasoning, has the ability to design and create and the ability to know and communicate with God.

2<sup>nd</sup> Question. Is marriage simply a human social institution or a divine institution?

(S) Marriage is God’s idea and God’s institution. In Genesis 1 and 2, God sees man’s need for a life partner and he took the initiative to create a woman for man. God also took the initiative to institute the marriage relationship. Already *before* the man and woman fell into sin, God established the marriage relationship as a relationship in which a man and a woman leave their parents, a relationship of unity between only one man and one woman and a relationship of sex only inside the marriage relationship. God also maintained this institution

after the man and woman fell into sin. Both the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 19 and the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 repeat God's marriage institution as a continued divine institution on earth.

3rd Question. Why does God command his people to multiply and fill the earth?

(T) Some people think that God simply commanded people to multiply without any restraint? However, I notice that God's command to multiply is given after Genesis 1:26-27, which says, "God created man and woman in his own image" and before Genesis 3, which describes how the man and woman fell into sin. God's command to multiply and fill the earth demands an interpretation in its context. God's original intention was to fill the earth with people who were bearing the image of God! God designed the earth to be filled with people who know him, love him, obey him and glorify him. However, after the fall into sin, I read in Genesis 5:1-2 that Adam had a son *in his own likeness*, in his own image. Since the fall into sin, the earth is being filled with people who do not bear God's likeness in the same way as before the fall into sin. Nevertheless, God's original purpose did not change. God still wants to fill this earth with people who bear the image of God. This happens through Jesus Christ. When people receive Jesus Christ into their hearts and lives, they become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Therefore, when Christians consider questions like the over-population of the earth, birth control or how many children a couple should have, they must consider God's purpose to fill the earth not just with any kind of people, but with "people in God's image". God gives both the man and the woman the *ability* as well as the *responsibility* and the *choice* to reproduce. And if they cannot reproduce physical children, they can reproduce spiritual children.

4th Question. How do Christians fulfil God's command to subdue the earth?

(S) Genesis 1:28 says, "Subdue the earth and rule over the fish, ... the birds ... and every living creature that moves on the ground." First. The word 'to subdue' literally means "to conquer, to subjugate" or "to tame, to make level, to press down". Therefore, the task and destination of man is *to bring culture* to the uncultured areas of God's creation. They must make the uninhabitable areas habitable, turn the fallow land into arable land and tame the wild animals for domestic use. Through the practice of responsible science they must discover the natural laws in God's creation and use these physical laws for the well-being of people. However, this right to practise science, agriculture and industry is not without limits! Second. The word 'subdue' also means, "to preserve, to pickle". Therefore, the task and destination of man is *to preserve* God's creation from misuse, abuse and destruction. The use of the resources of the earth has limits imposed by God. Man may not misuse the resources of the earth for selfish enrichment or for the destruction of other people who live on earth. Man may not abuse God's creation by polluting the atmosphere, air, water or earth in a way that permanently disturbs the delicate balance of nature and leads to the destruction of the human race on earth. Man may also not waste the resources of the earth by mismanagement and thus cause famine and poverty. Third. The task of subduing the earth includes *bringing biblical or Christian culture to all the people in the world*. After the fall into sin, the natural cultures of all the nations in the world have incorporated sinful or evil aspects. *It is God's purpose to change the culture of every nation!* God intends to create a special people of God on earth with a special culture, which is called "the culture of God's kingdom"! Because human thought and behaviour is the object of God's revelation, therefore most biblical teaching is directly aimed at changing human culture!

5th Question. How do Christians fulfil God's command to rule over the earth?

(T) First. The word 'to rule over' literally means "to have dominion over, to subjugate". Therefore the task and destination of man is to control the creatures that God created in the air, on the land and in the sea. For example, in Proverbs 12:10 we read, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest act of the wicked are cruel." A Christian should therefore not be cruel to animals, but instead take good care of the animals in his possession. Second. The task of man is *to use* these animals, birds and fish *for the benefit of people*. Man must rule over them by making wise and edifying decisions with regard to the well-being of man. Before man fell into sin, God gave every seed bearing plant and every tree that has fruit with seed in it as food to man. However, after the fall into sin and the destruction of the sinful world in the flood, God also gave every kind of animal, fish and bird as food to man. We read in Genesis 9:3, "Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything." Third. The task to rule, however, is *limited to animals, fish and birds*. The task to rule is not extended to include other people. This means that certain people and nations may not arbitrarily rule over other people and nations, oppress them, enslave them or kill them.

6th Question. May Christians get involved in politics and other governing authorities?

(S) In the Old Testament, people like Moses, Joseph, David, Daniel and Nehemiah were all in very important positions of government and had a very good influence on everybody. In the New Testament, Nicodemus was a member of the governing authority of the Jews. In Luke 7 and Acts 10 Roman military officers became Christians. In Acts 13 the proconsul of Cyprus became a Christian and in Acts 17 a member of the Athenian council became a Christian. Jesus Christ died for all people and this includes people in authority. When people within the government become Christians, they may have very good influence in their positions. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Christians are urged to pray for all kinds of people, but especially for "kings and all those in authority", because God wants them to come to a knowledge of the truth and to be saved. Fourth. The task to

rule is also not extended to include the universe beyond the earth. Man should not waste precious money and resources to explore outer space, while there are still so many people on earth who are living in poverty and hunger.

**(T)     STEP 4. APPLY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of **possible applications**, consider which possible application does God want you to turn into a **personal application**.

**(S)**     I have come to a much better understanding of God's cultural task to Christians. Part of the Christian responsibility is to preserve God's creation.

One. Christians need to seriously consider the issue of destroying nature and upsetting the ecological balance. For example, Christians need to advocate their stand in issues like the destruction of the ozone layer around the earth, the destruction of the rain forests, the over-grazing of fields and the destruction of certain animals in the food chain.

Two. Christians need to seriously consider the issue of pollution in the world. For example, Christians need to advocate their stand in issues like water pollution by dumping toxins and industrial waste into rivers and lakes, air-pollution through uncontrolled industrialisation and transport and noise pollution.

Three. Christians need to seriously consider the issue of applying science in food production. For example, Christians need to advocate their stand in issues like the injection of growth hormones in animals that people eat, the adding of harmful preservatives and colouring to food and the changing of the structure of food by genetic engineering in plants.

Four. Christians need to seriously consider the issue of harmful applications of science in industry. For example, Christians need to advocate their stand in issues like the production of nuclear bombs and the production of materials for bacteriological and chemical warfare.

Five. Christians need to seriously consider the issue of harmful applications of science in the practice of medicine. For example, Christians need to advocate their stand in issues like abortion of unwanted children, mercy killing and genetic engineering in human beings.

**(T)**     I have become convinced that the cultural task God has entrusted to the Christian Church is not limited to the natural issues. Out of necessity it must also include intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual issues. Negatively, Christians should be engaged in fighting things like the lies, pornography and violence, which are propagated in the mass media as in magazines, on the TV and in show business. They should fight against the legalising of abortion and homosexuality, and the tolerance of racial discrimination and corruption. Positively, Christians should be involved in subduing ungodliness and unbelief by evangelisation. They should be involved in subduing immaturity and fruitlessness among Christians by disciplinarianism. They should be involved in eradicating social evils and ungodly values. They should be involved in building up good institutions like hospitals, old age homes, educational institutions and healthy recreational facilities that have true Christian influence instead of anti-God orientation. Christians should counsel people and help them to heal from their broken lives. Etc. The cultural task of the Christian Church concerns the total man, all parts of creation and every aspect of human culture!

**(S)     STEP 5. PRAY**

Let us take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in Genesis 1:24 –2:3.

Dear Father in heaven, thank you for teaching me the cultural task of the Christian Church and helping me to understand my personal responsibility towards the natural creation. Help me not to pollute your creation and waste your resources. Teach me how to practise science in a responsible way that will bring glory to you and that will help extend your kingdom.

**(T)**     Dear Father in heaven, give me your love and grace to help people change the sinful aspects of their culture and to accept the culture of the kingdom of God. Help me to set an example of how to live according to the culture of your kingdom. Let especially my marriage and family be a blessing to my society and to my country! In Jesus' name. Amen!

**(S)     ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Which aspect of the cultural task does God want you to put into practice?

Second. Prepare next week's Bible study from Matthew 28:18-20. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. Etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".