

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will teach from the Bible what is a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: A DISCIPLE HAS FELLOWSHIP BY ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHURCH.

We will look at how the apostles describe the nature of the Church. Then we will learn about how the Church should function and how the Church should grow.

(S) **POINT 1. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

The word *church* in the original language means God's "called out people". The Church consists of people whom God has called out from every nation of the world to be his people. The apostles use different pictures to describe God's people and these pictures teach the nature of the Church. Let us look at 5 of these pictures.

(T) **First picture of the Church. The Church is people indwelt by the Holy Spirit.** Let me read 1 Peter 2:5. "You also, like living stones, are being built into a *spiritual house* to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Let me also read Ephesians 2:19-22. "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him *you* too are being built together to become a *dwelling in which God lives* by his Spirit."

Many people refer to the church as a *building or a place* where Christians meet. However, the Bible describes the Church as a *group of people indwelt by the Holy Spirit*. Therefore the Church is called a *spiritual house* or a *holy temple* and each Christian is called a *living stone*. Acts 17:24-25 says that God does not live in temples built by hands, in buildings of stone. And it says that human hands do not serve God, as if he needed anything. The Church is never a place of dead stones, but always a group of living people in whose hearts Christ lives.

(S) **Second picture of the Church. The Church is the family of God.** Let me read 1 Timothy 3:14-15. "I am writing these instructions so that ... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in *God's household*, which is the church of the living God."

In some places, Christians organise their churches like a company run by bosses and employees. They follow the way of successful companies in the world, which depend on authoritarian command structures and company rules and money. However, the Church is not a company, but *the family or household of God*. In this family, God relates to his children as a *Father* and the members of the family relate to one another as *brothers and sisters*. A person becomes a member of this family not by appointment or employment, but by *rebirth* through the Holy Spirit. The most important rule in this family is "*to love God with all your heart and life and to love your neighbour as yourself*".

(T) **Third picture of the Church. The Church is God's holy nation chosen out of every nation on earth.** Let me read 1 Peter 2:9. "But you are a *chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Let me also read Revelation 5:9. They sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation*."

Some Christians regard their church as a *national church*, which excludes people from other nations. However, the Bible teaches that the Church is an *international nation* belonging to God, a *chosen and holy nation of God*, which includes people from every tribe, people group, nation or language in the world. In Ephesians 2:14-18, the apostle Paul teaches that Christ through his death on the cross has taken away the dividing wall of hostility, which separated the nations from one another, and has reconciled his chosen people from all nations to God and to one another.

(S) **Fourth picture of the Church. The Church is God's flock led by good shepherds.** Let me read 1 Peter 2:25. "You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." Let me also read 1 Peter 5:1-4. "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, ... Be shepherds of *God's flock* that is under your care, serving as overseers - not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted

to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory.”

In most parts of the world, cattle is driven in front of their herdsmen, but sheep always follow behind their shepherd. In the same way, the church should not become like a *herd of cattle*, driven and forced in a particular direction and lorded over by its leaders. The Church should always be like a *flock of sheep*, which follow *their Chief Shepherd*, Jesus Christ, where he leads and who are served and cared for by leaders who are like *good under-shepherds*. The Church as God’s flock belongs not to its leaders, but to God. Moreover, the Church should not be driven by authoritarian rule in the direction its leaders wants it to go, but should be led by shepherds who lead the people in the way God wants them to go and set a personal example.

(T) Fifth picture of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ with a great diversity of members.

Let me read Ephesians 1:22-23. “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is *his body*, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Many Christians regard the Church as an *organisation* or as a structure with unchanging rules and traditions, which are designed by people in the past. However, the Bible teaches that the Church is an *organism* called the *Body of Christ*, which continually grows and renews itself. Christ is the *Head* of the Body and all believers in Christ are the *members* of the Body. The Church should function like a body and not like an organisation. In an organisation, some members are more important than others, but in the Church all members are equally important. In an organisation, the policies and regulations of the organisation are the final norm for believe and behaviour. However, in the Church, the commands and teachings of God in the Bible should be the final norm for faith and behaviour. In an organisation, decisions are made by voting, but in the Church, decisions should always be based on the Bible and should be made by consensus (mutual agreement). Most organisations have limited and specialised objectives, but the Church is concerned with every aspect of life, with truth and with justice, with belief and behaviour, with personality and character development, with family life and life in society, with life in the present as well as with life in the future. While the members of most organisations are *uniform* in their outlook and activities, the members of the Church are *pluriform*. They have received a great variety of spiritual gifts and tasks to accomplish in the Church and in the world. The contribution of all the members of the Church are needed and everybody needs the contribution of the other members.

(S) POINT 2. HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD FUNCTION

Let me read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 12-26. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ... The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ... But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.”

The Bible teaches three important principles how the Church should function.

(T) First function of the Church. The Church should preach the gospel of salvation. Without faith in Jesus Christ, no one will be saved. Jesus says, “If you are not born-again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:3,5). And the apostle Paul says that the only way a person can become a member of the Church, is when he is baptised with the Holy Spirit *into the Church*, that is, when he is born again. No one is born a Christian. A Christian must be born again!

(S) Second function of the Church. The Church should accept a diversity of gifts and tasks. Although there exists only one Body of Christ, it consists of many different members. The members differ with regard to the different spiritual gifts they have received, the different services to which they are called and the different ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests his work through them in the Church. For example, one Christian may have received the spiritual gift of *teaching*; he has been called to serve as a *teacher for children* and he manifests his teaching ability especially in *drawing illustrations and telling good Bible stories*. Another Christian has also received the spiritual gift of *teaching*; he has been called to serve as a *teacher for adults* and manifests his

teaching ability especially in *leading good Bible Studies* for adults. Etc. The members also differ with regard to the different places they have been assigned in the Church. For example, one Christian with the spiritual gift of *showing mercy* has been assigned to help the poor members *in his local church*. Another Christian with the same spiritual gift of *showing mercy* has been assigned to help the blind and disabled *in his community*. Etc.

The characteristic of the real Church is *not uniformity, but diversity!* Uniformity leads to disunity, because many members cannot find room in that church to function with their spiritual gift and service. But diversity can lead to real unity, because the service of every Christian is needed and every Christian needs the service of the others. The Church can only be what it should be and do what it should do if it possesses all those diverse members and if all those members are governed from one centre, namely its Head, Jesus Christ.

(T) **Third function of the Church. The Church members should be mutually dependent.** In the Church there is no reason for inferior or superior feelings and evaluations. The eye needs the ear and the hand needs the feet. Each member is necessary for the functioning of the Church. Each member should show concern for the other members. That means, that they should fulfil the *one another responsibilities* to one another. They should fulfil these responsibilities towards members of their own local church as well as to the members of the Body of Christ worldwide.

(S) **POINT 3. HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD GROW**

Let me read Ephesians 4:11-16. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

The Bible teaches three important principles how the Church should grow. The Church should not remain static or unchanged, but should grow in spiritual quality and in numerical quantity. Its growth in quality is the indispensable prerequisite for its growth in quantity. The Church is built up by every believer serving, by the ever-growing unity in the relationships among the believers and by the ever-increasing maturity of each believer.

(T) **First principle of Church growth. The Church grows by building all the believers up to loving relationships.** Every member does the building. The Christians build one another up by fulfilling the *one another responsibilities* to one another. For example, they love one another, they carry one another’s burdens, they encourage one another, they teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, etc. The unity in their relationships should be based on “the faith and the knowledge of Christ” (verse 13). That means, that unity in the Church should be based on the teachings of the Bible, which comprises the body of the Christian faith. And unity in the Church should be based on every Christian knowing Jesus Christ personally as Saviour and fellowshiping with Christ every day.

(S) **Second principle of Church growth. The Church grows by discipling all the new Christians to maturity in Christ.** The mature Christians with the help of all the other Christians do the discipling. They make the new Christians *disciples of Christ* by helping them to have a growing relationship with Christ, by growing in their character and by growing in their obedience to Christ. The measure of maturity is always Christlikeness. Some visible results of maturity are *stability* in the teachings of the Bible, *truth* in beliefs, words and deeds, and *love* in all relationships.

(T) **Third principle of Church growth. The Church grows by equipping all the believers for service.** Specially gifted Christians, not necessarily the leaders of the church, do the equipping. The Christians are equipped to do the many different services in the Church. For example, some Christians are equipped to do evangelism; others are equipped to do discipleship. Likewise, Christians are equipped to do preaching, teaching, counselling, serving, giving, caring, etc. No member of the Church should just passively *attend Church*. Every member should eventually function in the task that Christ has assigned to him (Mark 13:34).

(S) **POINT 4. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Choose one of the following functions of the Church and begin to practise it in your church. The Church grows by building relationships of love. The Church grows by discipling new Christians to maturity in Christ. The Church grows by equipping all the Christians for their works of service anywhere in the worldwide Church. **Second.** 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”.