

### QUIET TIME

#### Theme: The Church

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understand.

Day 1 Ephesians 2:11-22  
The Church is a group of people in whom the Spirit of God lives

Day 2<sup>BS</sup> Ephesians 4:1-16  
The job description of a congregation

Day 3 1 Corinthians 12:1-11  
The different tasks and gifts of members of the congregation

Day 4 1 Corinthians 12:12-28  
The Church is a Body with different members

Day 5 John 10:1-16.  
The Church is one flock with one Shepherd

Day 6 1 Peter 2:4-10  
The Church is God's people with believers in every nation

Day 7 Ephesians 5:25-32  
The Church is the Bride of Christ

Day 8 Ephesians 1:15-23  
The Church is the fullness of Christ

Day 9 Acts 2:37-47  
The first congregation among the Jews

Day 10 Acts 10:24-35  
The first congregation among the Gentiles

- Think about Ephesians 3:20-21.  
God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.
- Pray to God for whom nothing is impossible – also in your congregation (Jeremiah 32:17,27).
- Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

### STUDY

#### Theme: Characteristics of the Church

Read study 21 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Theme: The job description of a congregation

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **Ephesians 4:1-16**

### MEMORISATION

#### 1. Motivation

Jesus memorised Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

#### 2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

#### THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

##### Matthew 18:20

For where two or three  
come together in my name,  
there I am with them.

##### Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

#### 3. Review and back-review

*Review* the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

#### 4. Review of the Bible books

*The last 6 letters of Paul, the 8 general letters and 1 apocalypse:*  
1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1&2&3 John, Jude, Revelation.

## 21. Characteristics of the Church

**A red-hot burning coal continues to burn if it is surrounded by other burning coals. Likewise a believer will only continue to grow and function when surrounded by other believers. A believer needs other believers to grow and to serve. In the Bible the Christian community is called 'the Church'.**

### A. The word 'church' (Greek: ekklesia) in the Bible

The word for 'church' in the original language of the Bible (Greek) is 'ekklesia'. It literally means 'those called out of the world' by God. It has the following different meanings:

Ekklesia means 'the congregation (assembly)' of God in the Old Testament that is led by elders (Psalm 107:32) (cf. Judges 20:2; Psalm 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:28).

Ekklesia means 'the congregation' of God in the New Testament when they gather together (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19; 3 John 6).

Ekklesia means 'the house church', the Christians gathering together in a house (Romans 16:5).

Ekklesia means 'the independent congregation', the total number of Christians in one place (Matthew 18:17): e.g. in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1); in Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31) (cf. Acts 15:41; Galatians 1:22; Revelation 1:12-13,20).

Ekklesia means 'the world wide Church', 'the Body of Christ', to which all congregations and individual Christians belong (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:21-22; 3:10; 5:22-33).

### B. What is the Christian Church?

The apostles of Jesus use different pictures in the New Testament to describe the Christian Church and how it functions.

#### Picture 1. The Christian Church is a group of people and not a building of stone.

The congregation is never a church building where Christians gather (Acts 17:24-25), but always a group of people in whom God lives through his Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). The Church is called 'a spiritual house' consisting of 'living stones' (Greek: oikos) (1 Petrus 2:5). Christians must know how to conduct themselves in 'God's household' (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church is also called 'a temple' set apart and dedicated to spiritual purposes (Ephesians 2:21). The Church is constructed of living stones (1 Peter 2:5). 'The foundation' of the Church consist of the apostles of Jesus Christ (including Paul) and the New Testament 'prophets' (preachers) during the first century A.D. Jesus Christ himself is 'the chief Cornerstone' (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-8). The apostles

founded local congregations by proclaiming the gospel and by making disciples (Acts 14:21-23).

#### Picture 2. The Christian Church is a family and not a business or industrial company

The Church is 'God's household' (Greek: oikēioi) (Ephesians 2:19). It is also called 'God's family (Greek: patria) in heaven and on earth' (Ephesians 3:15).

A person may be employed by a company when he possesses the right qualifications and after signing a contract in which his job description and salary are delineated. But a person can only become a part of the Church as God's family by God's unqualified grace and by rebirth through the Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13).

In a company the employer is the boss and the employees are one another's colleagues. But in the Church God is the Father of his children, together they form a family and the members are one another's brothers and sisters (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

In a company performance, achievement and productivity are most important. But in the Church 'who you are', your relationships and love for one another are most important.

#### Picture 3. The Christian Church is an organism, a living Body and not just an organisation

The Church is 'the Body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:23) which consists of individual Christians as members connected to one another, dependent on one another and sharing a common life.

An organisation is led by an ordinary human being (a president, chairman or director). But the world-wide Christian Church is led by its Head, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22).

An organisation is directed from the outside by human goals, policies and rules. But the congregation is directed from the inside by the indwelling Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ), who applies God's goals revealed in the Bible to each Christian's life and to the congregation as a whole.

An organisation is often unmanageable due to human and cultural traditions. But the Church should be free from unbiblical traditions (*Read* Mark 7:1-16). By holding on to the truth (revealed in the Bible) and to love for one another, the congregation grows and builds itself up (Ephesians 4:15-16).

In an organisation decisions are usually made by an autocratic director or by democratic voting. But in every congregation decisions should always and only be based on the Bible, correctly explained, and as much as possible on the unity of attitude, thinking, love and purpose of the members (Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2-4).

A person is a member of an organisation for a limited time. But a Christian is a member of the Church for all eternity due to his rebirth and the Holy Spirit who lives in him (John 10:28; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

An organisation always has a limited number of goals and areas of engagement. But the world-wide Church is occupied with every aspect of human life.

In an organisation people are expected to have the same thoughts, preferences, behaviour and sometimes wear the same uniform. But in the Church and in every congregation a great variety of people, cultures, ministries and spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) are present and ought to be appreciated.

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

The Church is 'the flock of God' led by the Chief-Shepherd, Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4). The body (or council) of elders are under-shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-3).

In most parts of the world herds of cattle are driven along in a particular direction by shouting and whip-cracking cowboys. But flocks of sheep willingly follow their shepherds who walk in front. Likewise, the Church ought not to be a herd of cattle lorded over and driven in a particular (dogmatic, ethic) direction by a few church leaders. The Church ought to be a flock of sheep served by and wholeheartedly following the council of elders who in their turn follow the Chief-Shepherd (cf. Ezekiel 34:1-24).

A congregation is never the possession of one or another denomination, but solely the possession of Christ who bought every Christian with his own blood (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28).

**Picture 5. The Christian Church including every congregation is international and not national**

The Church is 'a chosen people', 'a royal priesthood', 'a holy nation', a people belonging to God' (1 Peter 2:9-10) coming from every nation on earth.

The Church is not a national community that excludes members of other nationalities. It is never a denomination that excludes members from other congregations.

Christians do not choose who should belong to the Church, but God chooses people from every tribe, language and nation to belong to his kingdom, his people or his Church (2 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:13-14; Revelation 5:9-10). Every congregation ought to include people from different nations, languages and cultures that live in their district.

**Picture 6. The Christian Church is the Bride of Christ getting prepared for the wedding of the Lamb**

The Christian Church is 'the Bride of Christ' at the present time and will become 'the Wife of the Lamb' at Christ's second coming (Revelation 19:7; 21:1-2,9-10). Before his second coming Jesus Christ is preparing his Bride by sanctifying her through the Word (Ephesians 5:25-27). He is making her complete (Ephesians 1:23). But also the Bride (the Church) is preparing herself for the wedding of the Lamb by sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). The Church in her present form is not yet complete or perfect (*Read* Matthew 13:24-30,36-43).

There is only one Church (Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 9:31) and it consists of all the congregations in the history of the world. These congregations have a biblical independence from each other, have the same teachings, regulations and customs (1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33) and are registered, not on earth, but in heaven (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:23a). The Church consists of all those in heaven: God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, all the angels and all the believers from the Old and New Testaments that have already died (Ephesians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; Hebrews 11:10,16; 12:22-24) and of all Christians still living on the earth that are registered in heaven. Christians today are looking expectantly forward to the city that is to come, that is, when the Church will be completely prepared and ready as the Bride of the Lamb (Hebrews 13:14).

At the second coming of Christ the wedding of the Lamb shall take place, God through Christ shall make all things new and God shall live with his believing peoples on the new earth (Revelation 21:3-5). Only then will the Church be completely perfect!

**C. The relationship between Jesus Christ and the Christian Church**

The Bible teaches that there is but one Body of Christ, that is, the one world-wide Church of Jesus Christ.

**1. Jesus Christ is the Saviour and the Lord of the one world-wide Church**

The Church is not the property of any person (e.g. the founder), or of any leader (e.g. the bishop or the pastor), or of an organisation (e.g. a denomination). The Church belongs only to Jesus Christ! He calls it 'my Church' (Matthew 16:18). He bought the Church with his own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

**2. Jesus Christ is the Founder and Builder of the one world-wide Church**

The Church was not founded or built by any human (e.g. missionary) or human organisation (e.g. denomination), but by Jesus Christ. He says: "I build my Church' on this

rock (Matthew 16:18). He builds his Church on the foundation of his apostles and preachers (Ephesians 2:20). The apostle Peter had an important part, because the Lord used him and his proclamation of the kingdom to found the first congregations among the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles. (Acts 2,8 and 10).

The authority which in Matthew 16:18 is entrusted to Peter is in Matthew 18:18 given to the Twelve (cf. John 20:23). The local congregation has a part in the exercise of this authority (to include and to exclude) (Matthew 18:17; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 6:4).

### 3. Jesus Christ is the Head and Bishop of the one world-wide Church

The Church does not have any human or human institution as its Head, but only Jesus Christ himself (Colossians 1:18a). Jesus Christ was appointed by God the Father to be the One whom all people must obey (Matthew 17:5)! Jesus Christ is 'the Chief-Shepherd' or 'Chief-Pastor' (1 Peter 5:4) and 'the Bishop' or 'the Overseer' (1 Peter 2:25) of the whole world-wide Church. No pastor or bishop or pope or patriarch may ever take this place of Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ exercises his authority as Head of the one world-wide Church through the Bible, the Holy Spirit and the body (council) of elders on the local level (1 Timothy 4:14). The Bible does not teach anything about world-wide Church Councils or nation-wide Synods or Conferences. 'The buck stops' on the local level with Christ through his Word, his Spirit and the council of elders.

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

The Church is not a part of any human organisation (denomination), but the Fullness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:23). Just as a bride complements the groom to become one complete fullness, likewise the Church (as the Body of Christ) complements Christ (as Head of the Body) to be one complete Fullness. The Body consists of all the local congregations and individual Christians in the world.

The Body of Christ carries out the will of its Head, Christ. Christ uses the Church to accomplish his plan in the history of the world: to save his people, to cause them to grow and become disciples, to sanctify them and to spread his kingdom (kingship) and righteousness everywhere on earth.

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

The Church may not glorify certain persons (e.g. the leader or particular saints) or a particular human institution (e.g. a particular denomination), but should

always only glorify God through Christ (Ephesians 3:21; John 16:14; cf. Isaiah 42:8; Romans 11:36).

## D. Functions and forms in the Christian Church

### 1. Uniformity or diversity in the Church?

Although there is but one Body of Christ it consists of many local congregations and individual believers (1 Corinthians 12:12). To each believer grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (Ephesians 4:7) and this may consist of a great variety of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4), a great variety of ministries (1 Corinthians 3:5; 12:5; Mark 13:34), a great variety of effects or manifestations (1 Corinthians 12:6-7) and a great variety of places within the one world-wide Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:18)!

A distinguishing characteristic of the one Church is that Christians are not the same and also cannot do the same ministries, but that Christians are unique, different from one another and have received different abilities (*Read* 1 Corinthians 12:14-20). Who would show mercy if every Christian would like to be the leader or the teacher? If every Christian would be able to do the same things, this would lead to tension and disunity. Many Christians would feel superfluous and useless. Precisely the great diversity leads to greater unity, because the ministry of each Christian is needed by the other Christians. Each congregation can only do what it ought to do when it gives room for diversity among its members.

The members of the Church are completely dependent on one another just like the members of a human body. There should be no room for inferior or superior thoughts and feelings. The eye needs the ear and the hand needs the foot. Every Christian is important and needed. Every member is indispensable for the good functioning of the congregation. Every Christian has received authority to exercise his or her responsibility. For example, leadership in the congregation is not a position, but a function (an office with responsibility and with its accompanying limited authority).

The members need to have the same concern for one another and care for one another (*Read* 1 Corinthians 12:21-27), love one another, carry one another's burdens and encourage one another. This includes the elders, who must watch over one another (Acts 20:28). And this includes the members of congregations in other districts or countries in the world (*Read* 2 Corinthians 8-9). Every Christian is important in the eyes of Jesus Christ!

### 2. Traditional or contemporary forms in the Church?

The traditional forms of expressing Christian functions (as for example: the manner of praying, the method of baptism with water, the way of celebrating the Lord's Supper, the liturgy during the worship service) may not become fixed rules or regulations. Jesus Christ condemned

all human religious traditions that nullified the Word of God. He said that such traditions are completely worthless, because they are “rules taught by men”. During the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had changed particular ‘forms’ into compulsory traditions’. For example, they changed the washing of hands before the meal into a compulsory regulation for all Jews (*Read* Matthew 15:1-9). Jesus Christ condemned forms that are maintained purely for the show (*Read* Matthew 23:25-29).

Although all Christian functions in practice are expressed in some kind of form, these forms need to express the biblical teaching and function very clearly, must have clear and real significance and must be practiced sincerely. The form in which a function is expressed may never become more important than the contents or reason of the function (e.g. the method of baptism with water must never become more important than the meaning of baptism with water). Not a single form should become a fixed rule or regulation! Every form must again and again be tested whether it still expresses God’s Word. (*Read* Mark 7:1-13).

A congregation should express all these forms in a biblical and contemporary way. The first congregation in Jerusalem expressed their fellowship by meeting every day in the precinct of the (Jewish) temple (Acts 2:42,46). The form in which they celebrated the Lord’s Supper was to combine it with an ordinary meal at home (Acts 2:42,46; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22). The form in which they expressed their giving of gifts was to sell some of their property and share it with the needy (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). The form in which they conducted baptism with water was sometimes outside where there was some water into which they could walk (Acts 8:36-39a) and sometimes inside a house where they could stand and have water poured over them (Acts 9:17-18; 2:17; 22:16; cf. Titus 3:5). And the form in which they prayed was with uplifted hands (1 Timothy 2:8; Psalm 134:2) or by kneeling down (Acts 20:36; Ephesians 3:14).

But nowhere in the Bible is the Church taught or commanded to do all these above mentioned functions in a particular prescribed form! Christians may also express these functions in contemporary forms. Christians always compose and sing new spiritual songs and make music with various musical instruments (Psalm 33:3; 150:3-6; Ephesians 5:19).