

# The Way

## Bible Studies about Discipleship

for Continentals/Young Continentals  
and any other youth choir/gospel group involved  
in music ministry

These bible studies have been proven to be the key for personal growth  
and the right preparation for music ministry

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# The Way

The way is a training method aimed at causing spiritual, musical and social growth in young people, which should result in their ability to motivate others in their own church, choir or youth organisation.

During rehearsals these bible studies are kept brief in order to leave time for preparing the participants for their task/performance.

The idea was developed by Leen La Riviere

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This is a special celebration edition on the occasion of Continental Sound's 30th anniversary, Disciple's 25th anniversary and Euro-Continentials' 15th anniversary.

## The Organisation's Mission Statement:

*"Called to participate in God's Kingdom means: putting into practice love, compassion, liberty, solidarity and justice, resulting in influencing and shaping culture in a creative and/or evangelistic manner"*

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# Chapter 1 - Background and Introduction

The 'Continentials' first went into Europe in 1969. Leen La Riviere (the Continentals' European mentor since 1969) soon saw that The Continentals' way of ministry could be applied cross-culturally.

1974 saw the first non-American Continentals group, with "Come together in Jesus' name" as their central theme: This first disciple group was on the road with its programme for two years. A concert programme with a variety of songs was put together in 1976. The Continentals' system of selection, auditions, criteria and participation in projects was limited to one year, and initially came across as very un-Dutch. It did mean, however, that relationships stayed pure and a new programme was adopted each year. It also offered an opportunity to different people to take part each year.

## Aims

A 'Discipleship' year consists of 8 weekends of training, followed by 7 months of weekend performances. After that everyone goes home to their own local choirs, gospel groups, churches, youth groups, etc, to put into practice what they have learnt. Many ex-Discipleship members are now great motivators in their own home towns and churches. The Continentals' training is 8 days, followed by a three week tour - offering the same benefits.

## Method

The Continental & Disciple way of ministry includes a number of training aspects which have proved their worth over and over again. The learning and training aspects:

- Social: social inter-action, behaviour in host families; behaviour generally
- Musical: learning the repertoire, different approaches to learning, singing technique, musical inter-action, production
- Performance: movement on stage, production, body language, choreography, public speaking, co-operation
- Technical: travelling, light, sound
- Spiritual: many spiritual aspects play a part in functioning properly. E.g.: what do we believe, what are we communicating, being a witness, prayer, practical bible study, etc. In short: how to become a Disciple (= a follower) of Jesus Christ, **which is what this book is all about.**

However, this book is not a deep theological 'oeuvre'. Rather, it deals with matters of pertinence to the spiritual growth of the person as well as the group as a whole.

## Broad application

These bible studies have been very useful to the 'Continentials', the 'Young Continentals' and other groups. They have proved their worth to many youth choirs and gospel groups. In order to increase their usefulness to these latter groups, this publication has been revised so that its content is more broadly applicable.

## Focused application

The "Discipleship training" is used by all Continental groups and is a great encouragement to grow spirituality and in motivation through bible studies and discussions which can edify every Christian choir, gospel group and youth group.

## How?

- Start rehearsals with a short time of meditation and prayer. This could be led by one of the people in charge, or a member of the group.
- This could be followed by a short discussion.
- Continentals, Young Continentals and Disciple sometimes use complementary lists of questions to help steer and encourage personal application. These question lists are not included here to leave room for creativity.

Here are some suggestions for questions to use in a Bible study to follow on:

- Are you in agreement or not; if not, why not?
- Which do we see as important aspects to be applied to our lives?
- How would we go about applying particular ideas?
- How can we improve on the quality of our lifestyle?
- How can we improve our contact with God, our fellow-man, society, creation?



## Chapter 2 - Foundation

*One can only build on a sound foundation. What is the foundation for "Discipleship"?*

a) Social. If we stick to the rules, the duration of the project will be of maximum benefit both to us and to the others. These rules can be found in "Facts for Tour" for The Continentals. Of course, each youth choir or gospel group has to set their own rules and regulations in order to function properly.

b) Musical/artistic. Experts occupy themselves for months with programme, theme, production and choreography. A performance is far more than a number of songs, blindly chosen because they sound nice. This expertise makes The Continentals leaders in their field in terms of innovation.

c) Performance. Experts are involved with choreography, clothing, styling, stage design, production.

d) Technical. Technicians make it happen: light, sound, stage management, logistics and therefore the whole production.

e) Spiritual. Any involvement by Continental Sound, The Continentals and Disciple is based on:

- The Bible as the inspired word of God;
- The local churches as a base from which to operate;
- The belief that they are part of God's Kingdom;
- Participants' personal faith in Jesus Christ.
- Respect for other people's beliefs. We do not involve ourselves in proselytism (i.e., "my church is better than yours"). Our aim is to bring people closer to God, let people be followers of Jesus. The call to repentance is therefore always the challenge to follow Jesus - which can be done in every church. At the same time, we respect the theological differences as a historic presupposition.

What is the spiritual foundation of a youth choir? It makes sense to describe this briefly.

### Growth

A foundation can be strengthened. In order to survive, reap maximum

benefit and be blessed from a year of Discipleship, a person has to strengthen both their personal and their group foundation.

### Spiritual foundation

1. Luke 6:46-49: *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the **foundation** on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground **without a foundation**. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."*

Important points for consideration::

- We need a strong and deep foundation in order to stand firm in the midst of the storms of life;
- Don't build on 'loose sand'. Examples of 'loose sand': people's opinions, unfounded beliefs, childish faith, unbiblical expectations;
- Build on the 'rock'. The 'rock' in biblical terms is Jesus Christ;
- Note what Jesus means in verses 46-47: Who is built on the rock? Not those who talk about Jesus, the Lord, faith, but those who listen to him and **do what He says**.

2. 1 Cor 10:10-15: *"And do not grumble, as some of them did - and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did - and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are **standing firm**, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful, he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say."*

A couple of points:

- The foundation, our foundation is Jesus Christ;
- Much can be built on this foundation: temporal things and eternal things, beautiful things and ugly things. What are we building on this foundation? In other words: what are we doing with our lives? How do we remain standing firm?



3. Eph 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."*

For consideration:

- Jesus is the cornerstone: the carrying force in the foundation;
- Parts of the foundation are apostles and prophets: Old Testament and New Testament are therefore very important! We should read our bibles regularly and ponder what it means for our own lives and for others;
- What we build and how we grow (in spite of each life's uniqueness) is a temple in the Lord, so long as it is built on truth.

4. 2 Tim 2:19: *"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows whose who are His' and 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'."* The certainty of the foundation gives us extra strength and ability to stand firm: The Lord knows **us**.

5. Heb 6:1-3: *"Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement. And, God permitting, we will do so."* These Bible verses mention important contributing factors to help make our foundation strong and eternal! The writer of Hebrews sees the following aspects in that foundation:

a) It means we need to turn away from "dead" concerns (like no purpose, life or future). Examples of these "dead" works:

- Thinking that your good deeds will get you into heaven, that you can 'bribe' God with them;
- Confessing our faith only, without showing it in our deeds;
- Worshipping or creating other gods; Who or what are these gods? Anything we consider more important than God. This could be our
- Career;
- Self-centredness, selfishness;
- Greed (for possessions or money);

- Matters contrary to God's norms and values, like stealing, jealousy, lying or slander;
- The occult (horoscopes, tarot cards, and the like).

b) Faith in God.

This part of the foundation makes it clear that there is **one** God, **one** Lord, **one** salvation, redemption and forgiveness of sins through Him only; He is the only way, He is a personal God, whom we may know as a personal friend, father, brother, who can be involved in our everyday life (He is not an impersonal power - like "May the force be with you" from Star Wars).

c) Baptism

- Baptism is seen as a part of the foundation. We could endlessly discuss the procedure and approach to baptism, but we ought not to do that, as there are so many viewpoints. It is essential that a person gets baptised. Biblically it signifies following Jesus and becoming part of God's Kingdom; it is also a symbol of the belief in redemption and forgiveness of sin (cleansing); it is a witness to walking in a newness of life with God; making or sealing a pact. All of these are aspects of water baptism.

• Secondly there is a baptism in the Holy Spirit. About that, too, we could hold endless discussions regarding procedure and approach, but we need to accept the different views. Essentially, everyone may receive the Holy Spirit. Conversion itself is a sign already that the Holy Spirit is at work. However, the Bible mentions a filling (being filled full) with the Holy Spirit which is received through prayer (see the book of Acts). The Holy Spirit is our comfort(er) after Jesus ascended to heaven (Ascension Day) and seemingly 'left' us.

The Holy Spirit is God's seal on our lives. The Holy Spirit gives us gifts (see 1 Cor 12 and 14); the Holy Spirit gives us fruit (as result of a growth process - see Gal 5:22); the Holy Spirit gives people different kinds of gifts (1 Cor 12:1-11; 28-31); these are particular tasks. The Holy Spirit provides us with special defences, a spiritual armour (see Eph 6:10-17).

d) Laying on of hands

This aspect can sometimes be too sectarian in application. However, it is Biblical! It is mentioned throughout the Old Testament as well as the New Testament and is a symbol of:

- Blessing;
- Solidarity, commitment and unity;



- Reconciliation and healing;
- Sanctification and holiness;
- Prayer.

### Raising the dead

This is of fundamental importance. This is **not** reincarnation. Although it is true that everyone who dies, will continue, but with a different body (no longer flesh and blood). That spiritual body knows no sickness or pain, can move from one place to another in the blink of an eye - walls are no barriers (cf Jesus after his resurrection). It means that life after death is eternal. Whether that happens depends on a number of factors (see below). Of fundamental importance is the fact that dying is not death: there is a resurrection. The life that God imparts is stronger than the enemy's last and strongest weapon which is physical death.

### Eternal judgement

Judging is an important aspect of the foundation:

- God will judge us and our deeds;
- There are many questions about the dreadful situations in the world: the injustice and unfairness; God will deal with all that (perfectly) once and will deal with the instigators of all the horror.

This should alert us to the fact that we need to live our lives in accordance with the norms and values in the Bible. And when we make a mistake, there is forgiveness and a new start. Don't ever be driven by fear of God's judgement! That would keep us in bondage. Jesus sets us free, to live and grow based on a sure foundation.

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 3 - Discipleship

Mark 1:14-20:

*"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come', He said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' ..... 'Come, follow me', Jesus said ..... At once they left their nets and followed Him....."*

The very name of our training programme 'Discipleship' suggests that we see ourselves, in some respects, as followers of those first disciples. The question is, is that right? Can our calling be identified with the calling of those first disciples?

Firstly, let us look at Jesus' "public career". He is baptised and God's Holy Spirit descends on Him. Immediately the Holy Spirit leads Him into the desert to resist Satan's temptations. Since John - the "preparer of the way" - has lost the right to speak out, Jesus decides to travel around Israel. However, before He starts, He calls disciples, followers, servants. It was, and is, God's intention that Jesus is not the only one to preach the good news, but that God also wants to use disciples.

Let's continue this comparison between the first disciples and 'ourselves', but this time concerning the individual following of Jesus. So who are these disciples? If I was Jesus, I would surround myself with people of great wisdom, people from the top layer of society, people who are respected. But, looking at Jesus' actual disciples, we notice:

- They were fishermen, peasants, labourers. Professions from the bottom layer of society of that time (and our time). Certainly not a group that would automatically demand people's respect or attention. A person does not have to have a degree in theology to become a 'disciple'.
- Following on from the point above, we can say that Jesus fits in well with the disciples' backgrounds. He lets them be fishermen, harvesters, sowers, but new people at the same time. (A new life in Christ!) He called ordinary people.
- The disciples were from Galilee. And that is where their calling started (v 21: Capernaum is in Galilee). Galilee was a remote area. The calling of these disciples - and also of us - did not start immediately in China or Africa.



- There is no room for doubt/wavering in the calling: Jesus does not hesitate (no probationary period); neither do the disciples hesitate in following Him (see Mark 10:17-23. Luke 9:57-62).

The disciples were not exactly known for their amazing wisdom, insight or tact, during those first days on the road with Jesus. But they were completely committed to Jesus, and followed Him wherever He went, and they learnt from Him. They made mistakes, but they were under God's calling and they had His authority. So do we! We step out of the 'comfort-zone' and go on "the way" as part of a music-ministry.

Continentials provides an opportunity for learning, too. It is important that we, as followers of Jesus, show that we are 'faithful servants' in the little things of ordinary life. Our pride often hinders us in this. Wouldn't we all prefer to be called to heal the sick? But doing the little things is an important phase in being a disciple. Our calling is just as worthwhile! Our life is enriched by it. Jesus calls us. If we are faithful in the ordinary, little things, we will remain faithful when we are called to really 'big' things.

We get to know the disciples well through various stories, like:

- the story of the five loaves and three fishes;
- the storm on the lake;
- the 'blessing' of the children;
- Peter's betrayal of Jesus.

John 20: 19-23: *"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After He said this, He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'"*

Even after His death and resurrection, Jesus 'calls' His disciples again. The most recognisable thing about us, as disciples of this day and age, is the Holy Spirit. God's presence in us helping us to be His witnesses. The Holy Spirit came to make Jesus known (John 21:15-25).

John 21:15-25: *"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord', he said, 'you know that I love you'. Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs'. Again Jesus said, 'Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you'. Jesus said, 'Take care of my sheep'. The third time he said to him, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said, 'Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you'.*

*Jesus said, 'Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, 'Follow me!'*

*Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is going to betray you?') When Peter saw him, he asked, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.' Because of this, the rumour spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; He only said, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?' This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who writes them down. We know that his testimony is true.*

*Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."*

We read here what Jesus actually asks of us, after we find - sometimes in a totally radical manner - that of ourselves we can do nothing. It does not matter to Him what we have been through, what is in our past. What matters is that we love Him and want to follow Him. Those who seem least suitable in our eyes are used by God to be the leaders of the church of the future. This shows that God wants us to grow as disciples, so that we, too, are able to carry increasingly more responsibilities for Him.

Being new generation leaders does not mean that we will live a life of riches and material wealth. What we will have is a meaningful life under



Jesus' leadership and protection and that is life abundant. (John 10:10)

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 4- Discipline (general)

We can be so anti-authoritarian, over-tolerant and super-individualistic that functioning as a group can become nigh on impossible. In order to function as a group with shared qualities, and achieve on a significant and truly spiritual scale, we need discipline! That does not require super-human qualities, only the right approach.

Jesus asked ordinary people to become disciples. That did not stop with the twelve. Jesus called everyone to become disciples, that means to become His followers (see, among others, Acts 9:36, Acts 6:1, etc).

Part of discipleship is acquiring discipline. This is necessary for all parts to function together and to enable the community/group to exist and achieve something. The most crucial step is to submit our own individualistic, self-centred outlook/attitude to the whole and the leadership. If we have never learned to submit and commit ourselves to the leadership, we ourselves will not be able to lead. A group/choir is not a democracy with 'one person, one vote' in which majority rules. We base ourselves on a Biblical model of leadership in which leadership leads by example, but where authority is defined, so that leadership does not mean dictatorship (which is very **unbiblical**).

For best results, we need:

- Social discipline: how we relate to each other and to others;
- Artistic discipline: results are only possible by practice, practice and more practice. And: co-operation, co-operation and more co-operation;
- Spiritual discipline: submission, tolerance, learning to control our temperament/ irritation, tackling problems at the right moment, accepting correction, keeping courage, holding on to motivation, prayer routine (keep praying for each other, for the leaders, for the performance, for the audience, for the testimonials, etc);
- Both personal and group discipline: listening to the leaders' instructions and carrying these out without complaint or discussion. (Prov 13:3 says: *He who guards his lips, guards his life*" - see also James 1:26, 3:2-10). *Be tolerant, working together in humility.* (see a.o. Eph 4:1-20) kindness (see a.o. Phil 4:5).

Therefore, this Continental ministry and discipline have everything to do with each other. A good disciple has to have discipline. Maybe discipline



should be a disciple's trademark. In this case, both apply. Without personal discipline there can be no group discipline, without group discipline there can be no co-operation, without co-operation there is no message, without a message there is no communication and without communication the group/choir has no purpose.

Let's be practical: in what respect do we need to have discipline. This study will focus mainly on group discipline. This involves the personal discipline (required of the individual) for the benefit of the group.

The next Bible study concerns personal discipline aimed, in first instance, at the personal spiritual life. Of course, we can't look at the two as entirely separate issues, so they will be looked at in quick succession.

Group discipline, as mentioned above, is mainly concerned with:

- our thoughts;
- our deeds;
- our words.

Our thoughts form the real basis for what we do and what we say. So the first sign of our discipline are our thoughts. Discipline from the Holy Ghost, a conscious choice we need to make continuously in order to keep our thoughts in submission to God's Spirit.

The general rule for what we do with our body is that it should glorify God (thoughts and actions should concur). (1 Cor 6:19-20). So we need to ask ourselves that question in what we do. If we can be honest with ourselves there we have gained in discipline.

The bible is very clear about the things we say. Proverbs 13:3 and James 1:26 and 3:1-10 strongly call for a discipline of the 'tongue'. The tongue (our words) can encourage, bless or curse! *'C'est le ton qui fait la musique'*. Here, too, we need to have a close look at ourselves, confess any faults and, while praying, discipline ourselves.

The purpose of this discipline is so that we can serve God (=serving others). This form of discipline is essential for the optimum service of the group. Without it, there will not be the unity that is so important in achieving our goals. Jesus said, "Who is the greatest in God's Kingdom? He is the servant of all!"

Eph 4:1-6 and Phil 2:12-18: *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

*"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life - in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you, too, should be glad and rejoice with me."*

Discipline promotes unity. It costs, that is true, but the Bible calls us to this because there is only one body. So should we say, "I'm not allowed ..."? On the contrary. We should rejoice that we can shine like stars in the universe (Phil 2:14-15) in the midst of this world full of sin. Think of all those in the audience who do not yet know Jesus. If we shine in unity, they will see that one God! Wouldn't that be wonderful?

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 5 - Personal Discipline

In the previous chapter we looked at group discipline. Now we will concentrate on discipline that is aimed at our personal life.

1 Cor 9:23-27: *"I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*

Paul very clearly calls for a personal discipline from the community at Corinth, but from us, too, as "Disciples of our time". And he shows a clear reason for personal spiritual discipline without specifying exactly what he means by this discipline. That approach is quite similar to the way we react to being disciplined: we first want to find out what is in it for us. Paul goes along with that and gives the example of a running race. We need to train ourselves, it requires a lot of effort, but at the finish line the prize waits for us! So what are the different reasons for training ourselves:

- The prize that really awaits us;
- The opportunity to be used by God;
- It builds character: not out of what is not allowed, but out of how we discipline ourselves.

These three reasons pre-suppose a 100% surrender to God. If our life does not belong to Him, we cannot comprehend the above-mentioned reasons and disciplining our lives will be meaningless.

Suppose we view God as a Marketing Manager where He motivates us into action with all kinds of 'nice' rewards. Could the picture be that stark? In order to answer that question we need to look at the purpose of our discipline. As I mentioned before, we have not yet specified in what respect we need our discipline, because we first need to grasp God's intention for it.

Luke 9:57-62: *"As they were walking along the road, a man said to him,*

*'I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head'. He said to another man, 'Follow me'. But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father'. Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God'. Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family'. Jesus replied, 'No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God'. "*

If we had to summarise the contents of this passage, we could look to the Old Testament:

*"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." - 1 Sam 15:22*

God's purpose is not that He wants to see His children toil and sacrifice. On the contrary, what matters to God is that we listen to Him. Discipline's purpose is that we hear Him. And one step on from there is to achieve the purpose (God's plan) for our lives by obedience to God. That would make us a better Disciple!

Ultimately we come back to God's unimaginable love for us. He makes demands on us, but immediately shows us the 'reward', which is to our own benefit. Isn't following God the most important choice we can make in our lives?

Reward:

- For the reward (wages) of sin is death, but the gift of God (= following God) is eternal life - Rom 6:23;
- God rewards those who earnestly seek Him - Heb 11:6.

What does it mean, this personal discipline? We read in Luke that it concerns hearing God's voice and obeying Him. How can we do this in reality? Let's use an example where we can put discipline into practice. Having a 'quiet time' (time of prayer and reading the Bible) helps us hear God's voice. (It is not the intention to issue a 'commandment' on how to have a quiet time. God has given us His Spirit to help find His will for our lives in our hearts).

Having a quiet time creates an opportunity for God to make Himself



known to us through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The time of prayer allows us to communicate with Him (communication is two-way traffic) A lot of books have been written on this subject and are worth reading. God wants to show us His will, He wants a relationship with us. He wants to communicate with us and reading the Bible is a good starting point.

We can learn a lot from this communication with God - whether or not through a 'quiet time' - generally as well as specifically in relation to discipline. The Bible provokes all of us to discipline in our thought life. Are we followers of Jesus there? The Bible is full of guidelines regarding how and what we should think. From preachings about God's word as well as other channels we can be taught. It's good to pray that God will show us how we can acquire such discipline. It is a conscious decision, wanting a higher discipline is our own choice, our own actions.

There are many other areas in which we need discipline, though I do not intend to produce an exhaustive list here. It is all about our personal discipline, concerns our personal relationship with God, relating to God's plan for us personally.

Of course the intention is not that we seek personal glory when we manage to be successful. Of ourselves we do not have the tendency to obey God and there can be many bad thoughts between us and God. At times we have no interest in reading God's word, let alone apply its contents to our own lives. And we are such creatures of habit, it may not be that easy to change (away from old habits that don't comply with God's will). We need to realise that we are followers of Jesus and as such can admit our weaknesses to Him. There is a wonderful promise in the Bible that 'I can do **all things** through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13).

As in a competition, winning does not come easily. But God is realistic and leads us through, step by step. But we do the sweating, running 'for our lives', battling (see Phil 3:12-14).

Believing - salvation - is no small matter. It brings us as disciples into a race, a competition, which we can only win based on personal discipline:

- 1 Tim 6:12: *"Fight the good fight of the faith".*
- Heb 12:1: *"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked*

*out for us."*

- 1 Cor 9:24-27: *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*

So, we are in a race! We have to be cunning, get counsel and aim for our goal - it is not the fastest who necessarily wins the race (see Ecc 9:1 and Prov 3:21); the first may be the last. Thoughtfulness is a personal discipline, too.

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 6 - Jesus, the Lord: our Lord?

In this day and age it is no longer a matter of course that a person makes himself a servant to someone who will lord it over him. Individual freedom and emancipation are much in the forefront these days.

Unfortunately, this can apply only too easily to our faith life, too. We are free to make our own religious choices, so long as we don't force our views on other people. These days, much of society is about "me and what's mine".

The title of this chapter is directly opposed to these trends. Does that threaten us? No, not if we get to know the Lord Jesus better, and come to see why he wants us to be disciples.

The term 'lord' is no longer in much use. We relate better in terms of boss, director, employer, manager and other indications of position within the employment situation.

Seeing Jesus as 'Lord' means that we see that he wants a relationship with man, because God created man and loves him. He wants man to live at peace with Him, for all eternity. So Jesus wants to be Lord of our lives.

We have already seen that a person does not automatically fit in with a lord. This certainly applies to man and God. This natural antipathy towards God was man's own choice. This creates a problem: man does not admit God as Lord of his life, but God does continue to woo man. That makes God so special: He does not give up.

Titus 3:3-8: *"At one time we, too, were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We live in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone."*

Key verses: Titus 3:4, 5a, 7.

God's gift to us is called 'grace' in the Bible - a difficult word - expressed in particular in Jesus Christ who freed us from sin (the hindrance between us and God) and thus provided us with the opportunity for a new relationship with God. Throughout the ages much has been said about 'grace', and the average person's understanding of grace has diverted somewhat from its original christian meaning. Still, what has not changed is that it is a present we don't deserve. But what do we do with it? Besides the gift of Jesus, God's grace has a lot more practical applications to our lives. Let's have a closer look at what the Bible says and study the idea more deeply.

We will look at two things:

- What is grace (in theory);
- How does it affect me (in practice).

The following points include one or more bible texts to help us realise the content of God's grace:

### THEORY

1. Grace comes from God (1 Cor 1:4);
2. God's grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Through Him we are freed from sin if we believe, i.e. if we receive His grace (John 8:36);
3. God's grace works in us (1 Cor 15:10), we may benefit from it (Eph 4:7).

### PRACTICE

1. Being justified by God's grace, we have the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:7b);
2. God's grace helps us in our daily life (1 Cor 15:10). Even stronger: God's grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:9);
3. Through God's grace we can begin a new life as disciples/followers of the Lord God, sanctified by Him and equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit (Ro 6:14, Titus 3:8, 3:5b-6).



It is most important to know what Jesus accomplished. It is of greater - even vital - importance to accept that into our lives, so that we, freed from the burden and equipped with the victory, can be disciples of Jesus.

Back to "Jesus the Lord: our Lord?". What does that mean? It does not mean that we lose all individual responsibility. Jesus as Lord means that no-one except Jesus has rule of our lives. That is what God requires of us (see a.o. 2 Cor 7:1). Why? Because it is not only insulting to our God and Creator to allow Him less than absolute say in our lives, it also is unwise. The least sensible thing a person can do is ignore the wise, loving, holy, just, forgiving and merciful Creator of the universe and refuse Him His rightful place as Lord over our lives. No-one knows us as God knows us (Ps 139) and He can give real meaning to our life (John 10:10). But only if He is Lord of our life.

Picture the following: William goes to a party and meets Mark. Mark invites him to come and have a drink after the party has finished. William would enjoy spending a bit more time with Mark and they agree to meet up outside after the party ends.

A few moments later William finds himself talking to John. John has recently moved and would like to show William round his new flat. William is quite interested, especially in John's new computer. He accepts an invitation to come and see the new flat after the party.

When the party finishes, William sees two cars outside, both ready to leave but in opposite directions. As William does not like to disappoint either of his two friends he puts one foot in each car. Both friends drive off and William is in trouble!

Psychologists call this: frustration, which is defined as 'having conflicting aims'.

People who try to live both for themselves and for God - who want to walk in two different directions - are frustrated people. We cannot know victory, or progress in our lives as disciples, as Christians, if we want to be our own boss and serve God at the same time. Having Jesus as Lord means that we submit to Him as much as we know how, and that we will grow as we are taught about - and read - God's word.

Having Jesus as Lord is not a 'status quo'. It is a way of life, full of

adventures and challenges. The first Christians were rightly called people of "the Way". Are we on "the Way" with Jesus? It will bring us maturity and make us complete.

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 7 - Faith

Biblical faith is not a matter of 'we'll see what happens'. Faith, according to the Old Testament, is 'something steadfast, something reliable'. The root of the Hebrew word is also the root of the word 'Amen', which means 'That is how it is; so be it'.

Abraham in the Old Testament is an excellent example of a person of faith. Genesis 15:6 says, "*Abram believed in God, and He credited it to him as righteousness*". Abraham stood firm and consistent, without wavering. He kept on believing in God, even in the face of adversity when God's promises did not look likely to come true. He kept relying on God. Abraham was a person with a steadfast faith and a good example to every believer. Did that make him a hero? No, just a believer like you and me.

The New Testament gives us some more aspects on faith:

Eph 2:8: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God.*" How wonderful. Faith is not some desperate attempt. God gives us grace. He says, 'I love you as you are'. Our response is faith. How come? We receive that faith as a gift from God. Is it a vague faith? No, it is absolute certainty. Heb 11:1: *"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."*

### Vague

Nearly everyone believes in 'something' these days. So there must be a difference. We do **not** believe in an impersonal, incomprehensible force or an unreachable angry God. Our faith is not some vague religiosity. Our faith is aimed at a personal God, the Creator of heaven and earth, Whom we can know completely through Jesus Christ. Our faith in Him saves us and makes all God's promises a reality.

### Little

Sometimes people think that examples of faith are some kind of giants: Abraham, Enoch, Noah, Moses, Daniel, Samuel, David, Peter, etc. Nothing could be further from the truth! It is a story of ordinary people, who believed and acted accordingly. This is an encouragement to us: Matt 17:20: *I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain 'Move from here to there' and it will*

*move. Nothing will be impossible to you."*

Rom 3:28: *"We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law."*

Rom 9:33: *"It is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame'."*

Rom 15:13: *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

1 Cor 2:4-5: *"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power."*

2 Cor 5:7: *"We live by faith, not by sight." This verse calls us not to live according to what we can see, but to act out of faith. Not to live according to our eyes' perception, but to live and act from who we are and what we've got in God.*

Gal 3:5-6,11-14: *"Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? Consider Abraham: he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness..... Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law, because 'The righteous will live by faith'. The law is not based on faith; on the contrary: 'The man who does these things will live by them'. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'. He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."*

Gal 3:26: *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."*

Eph 6:16: *"In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one."*

Phil 1:27: *"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear*



*about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel."*

*Col 1:4: "Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints."*

*Col 1:23; "If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."*

*1 Tim 4:12: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."*

*1 Tim 6: 10-12: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*

*Heb 11:6 "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."*

*Heb 12:2: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God."*

*James 1:2-6: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind."*

*1 John 5:3-4: "This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His*

*commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world: even our faith."*

Discipleship is faith in action!!

*John 3: 15, 18: "That everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life..... Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 8- Hope

This chapter was written after the theme for the 'Continentials' in 1998: "These remain: faith, hope and love" (1 Cor 13:13).

*"Faith is being sure of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb 11:1).

**Hope** is one of the foundations of our faith and our life. Unfortunately, every-day use of the word has cause it to lose some of its meaning. When we say, 'I hope so' we mean to indicate *uncertainty* which makes it necessary to look up what the Bible says about hope: truth to encourage and strengthen us. What do I hope for? What do you hope for?

What does the dictionary say about hope?

- To cherish a desire of good with some expectation of fulfilment;
- A desire of some good with a certain expectation of obtaining it;
- Anticipation: expecting that on which hope is founded.

Because the word hope is strongly connected to the word expectation, here are some of its meanings:

Expect/expectant/expectancy:

- To look forward to as likely to happen;
- Awaiting the arrival of a baby;
- The prospect of future good.

### Old Testament

- Various passages indicate that hope is something that gives certainty;
- Hope does not contradict faith, nor does it oppose it, c.q. weakening of faith. No, hope is an expansion, an enlargement of faith. As 'believing' depends on God's promises, so hope is based on God's assurances. Such a promise is not necessarily instantly fulfilled. But through our faith we hold on to the hope that the promise will be fulfilled. Hope is focused on God:
- God Himself is the hope of Israel (Jer 14:8: *"O hope of Israel, its Saviour in times of distress"*). Other examples can be found in Jer 17:3, Ps 119:49, etc.

- There is a wonderful prophecy of how sorrow shall turn to joy in Jeremiah 31: 16-17: *"This is what the Lord says, 'Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded', declares the Lord. 'They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your future', declares the Lord. 'Your children will return to their own land'."*
- The hope (expectation) of the unbelieving and wicked will eventually come to nothing. (Prov 10:28: *"The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing"*). This can be seen clearly in the history of the people of Israel at the time of Judges and Kings. For those who truly sought God (while ruled by a Judge or King who followed God) there was salvation, blessing and peace. For those who served idols the outcome was war, persecution and eventual exile. Those were bad times for the ordinary people: there was no hope!
- The last few books of the Old Testament tell increasingly more of the expectation and the hope that God will save His people through the Messiah.

### New Testament

The plan for salvation, that hope, becomes totally clear in the New Testament. That hope is Jesus, the Christ! This is clearly shown in Ephesians 2:12 where the unbelievers in this world have **no** real hope, because they do not know the true God: *"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men) - remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without god in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."* (Eph 2:11-13).

The true believer is founded on Jesus Christ, our hope! (See a.o. 1 Tim 1:1, 2 Cor 1:10, 1 Tim 4:10).

**Christians are always full of hope: 'hopelessly full of hope', 'hoppers'.** As a result of a change in our heart, direction, goal, salvation, intentions, life aims, we become like Jesus.



- We defeat/conquer our enemies: fear, sin, hatred, depression (all kinds of symptoms that kept us from true freedom;
- We ourselves become a sign of hope (1 Pe 1:3: *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (See also 1. Pe 3:15, 1 Th 2:19,20, 1 Jn 3:3). **We are visible signs of hope, we are 'hope'.**

### **Spiritual effects of hope**

Ez 37:11: *"Then He said to me, 'Son of man, ..... Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off'."* When people have no hope, they 'dry up'. They die spiritually and mentally. As a result the body, too, will die eventually. While there is life, there is hope. Which means that hope/expectation can be recovered, resulting in revitalisation/renewal of our lives (see, a.o. Eccl 9:4). Note the following process: (Rom 5:4-5): *"Perseverance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us."* Through the love of Jesus a process is at work in us that produces people of character, people who count! Such a process brings real hope. And that hope does not disappoint, because it holds good.

*"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain."* (Heb 6:19).

### **Signs of a completed hope**

Each one of the points below could be a Bible study in itself.

1. 1 Thess 5:8: *"But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."* (see also Eph 6:12-17). This spiritual armour can be seen by others. This helmet of hope of salvation shines in the darkness. Not with some kind of new age aura that is supposed to make a person god-like. No, this helmet is God-given as a crowning of your salvation. That makes it comprehensible enough for people to ask us about our hope (1 Pet 3:5).

2. Eph 4:1-5: *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gent-*

*le; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism."* Isn't that interesting? Together we are called to one hope. History explains how we ended up with so many different churches. And yet, together we are all the body of Christ in this world; in Him we are one, in Jesus we have one hope. It is very important to express and testify to this.

3. 1 Jn 3:2-3: *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."* Here, hope is part of a process of cleansing and sanctification, in order to get closer to Jesus and become more and more like Him. Based on our desire/motivation and the decisions we make, this is possible.

4. Rom 8:18-25: *"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."* This hope is founded on the fact that one day we will be perfect sons of God! One day, the human race, the environment, plants and animals will live together in perfect harmony. One day there will be a new heaven and a new earth with a true peace. We hope and long for the moment that the kingdom of God will be everywhere (Rev 21 and 22). What a hope, what a marvellous future: finally freedom for the whole of creation: "free at last"!



5. Hos 2:15: *"There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."* The Valley of Achor means a valley full of problems, wilderness, effort, mishap. Achan was stoned to death in this valley for stealing treasures after the Israelites took Jericho under Joshua. As a result of Achan's sin the Israelites were defeated at the next city, Ai (see Joshua 7). Such a valley is an untamed, inhospitable place. Every believer finds himself in the wilderness of life at some point or other in his life. How do we respond? God seems hard to find. And no-one seems bothered with us. We can either let go of all hope and die out there in the desert, or we can hang on and let this desert experience become the start of a new phase of our life. Thanks to that hope there will be new vineyards, new fruit, a new harvest, a new future.

6. 1 Cor 13:6-7: *"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."* There is a significant connection between love and hope. We can, and may, receive God's love where so often our human resources run dry. Love is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). We can receive and give love in supernaturally, thus keeping hold of hope. Hope is our human response to faith (which we received as a gift from God - Eph 2:8) and to love (a fruit of God's Spirit who lives in us). And when all is fulfilled, what remains? FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE (1 Cor 13:3).

### Encouragement

We should hold on to hope for a better future, for eternity, for a new life, for a new heart, hope for acts of compassion. Yes, there is hope (Col 1:23). *"If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."*

This is the hope we share, the hope of the gospel.

### Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 9 - Love

*On the occasion of The Continentals' theme for 1999*

The meaning of the word 'love' has been watered down. Originally it covers a multitude of meanings. We can see this from the original Greek texts in the Bible:

- 1) *Eros* = Love, with a sexual meaning: pleasure, passions, desires towards the opposite sex;
- 2) *Phileo* = Love, with a friendship meaning, camaraderie (also between a man and a woman). Phileo also means liking someone in a sisterly/brotherly context.
- 3) *Agape* = The unconditional love mentioned so many times in the Bible, selfless, sacrificial .... Agape is neighbourly love, and it is love in the highest sense of the word: ie from God for mankind, and from man for God. Agape also includes the love that shows through our deeds of unselfishness towards others.
  - The **Old Testament** shows God's love in the revelation of God to Israel and in His dealings with the people.
  - The **New Testament** shows God's love towards mankind and individuals. It also shows God's love in Jesus: God's character is shown in His life.

One of the greatest poems on love (the Agape variety) is found in 1 Corinthians 13. Its verses have encouraged and inspired millions of people throughout the ages.

1 Cor 13 *"If I speak in the tongues of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing."*

*"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."*

*"Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; here there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowled-*



*ge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.*

*"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

*"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

This marvellous chapter shows **9 characteristics** of Agape love:

1. Patience - love that is passive and unhurried, that can cope with suffering, keeps believing and hoping, and bears all things.
2. Kindness - active love: in kindness, not hasty, not inconsistent, not puffed up or proud.
3. Forbearance - in the face of envy/competition, love makes sure we are not jealous and remain righteous.
4. Humility - Agape-love is often hidden, it is not "on show"; (you do what has to be done, and then you withdraw); it is not vainglorious.
5. Courteousness - so important to social relationships. Courtesy is necessary to bridge the gap between social classes, it is the correct remedy against crudeness.
6. Selflessness - probably the essence of Agape. It does not turn sour, is not self-seeking, not self-centred, not bitter; it always looks for the good in others (or situations); it does not look for revenge or retribution.
7. Good humour - it controls our moods; it helps against irritation and short tempers.
8. Righteousness - as part of your attitude; hates sin and does not rejoice in someone's downfall; it rejoices in goodness towards others; it is slow to expose unpleasant business (think first, act later); it is always full of hope and looks for justice.
9. Honesty - necessary in our jobs, professions, employment; let's not be hypocritical; let's be concerned with the truth; love keeps on believing; honesty needs to be present all the time.

First, let us look at what a number of other passages in the Bible say about Agape:

Matt. 22:35-40 *"One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest command-*

*ment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments'."*

*We could call that the Bible in a nutshell. The vertical relationship with God connecting horizontally to our neighbour, together forming the cross. Every person is somewhere on this cross.*

Jn. 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."*

We can love God and others, because God loves us!

Jn 13:34-35: *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* Such an important mark of discipleship! Here we have a very clear, measurable, visible, recognisable, provable criterion!

Jn 14:15-19,21: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him, nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live you also will live.....Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."*

Here are a few more texts to make us think about love:

Ro 8:35,37-39: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? .....No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

James 2:5: *"Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?"*



1 Jn 4:7-12: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so love us, we also ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us."

1 Jn 4: 17-19: "In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement, because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

2 Cor 13:11: "Finally, brothers, goodbye: Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."

Gal 5:13-26: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say: Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

Eph 3:17: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..... rooted and established in love."

Eph 4:1-3: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Eph 5:1-2: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

1 Thess 5:8: "But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet."

So love is a decision; love is a commitment; of course, love does touch our feelings. Love is not some vague feeling, it is a decision we take and act upon: to love each other and God.

These actions have to go beyond saying, 'God, I really love you' or 'I really love my neighbour'. James makes it clear: show your faith and your love in your works. In answer to the question of how we should love our neighbour, Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan. He ends by saying, 'Go and do the same as this good Samaritan did'. Love shows in the decisions we make and how we act upon them. The first Christians were socially very active. They put on regular meals to feed the poor - it won't surprise us that these meals were called Agapes (love meals). Let's examine ourselves: how is our Agape love? Towards God, our neighbour, society, creation.

"Mission of love" is our theme for 1999: we are sent into this world, just like Jesus, to bring love in word and deed.

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 10: Fear Not

When a messenger of God meets an ordinary human, that human is full of fear and ready to faint. God's messenger says these words each time: 'Fear not'<sup>1</sup>. Why is that? Mainly to re-build the relationship so that the angel can deliver his message. The angel could have done it differently, but the words 'Fear not' free the person in question from the greatest negative force that can rule a human being: fear.

Fear can express itself in suspicion or jealousy. Fear is a force that can undermine our confidence. Fear can cause us to draw wrong conclusions about people's behaviour. Think of Saul's suspicion of David, where he had nothing to fear from him. Fear can affect our reactions. Fear can undermine our trust in others and in God. Fear can eat away at our faith. Fear can disintegrate our attitude. Fear is a negative force that can really keep people in bondage. Fear is one of the enemy's worst instruments in keeping a person bound.

There are different kinds of fear. We can be afraid of the devil resulting in us being useless soldiers in God's army. We can fear hell, so that we have no joy in heaven and lead a colourless life. We can be afraid of people, stopping us from developing and being ourselves. We can be fearful of the stage, of open spaces, of heights, and so on. We can even be afraid of God, so that we are never quite sure of His grace, mercy and forgiveness. Fear is the dark side of power.

There is only one opposite to fear: No fear. Which is exactly to which God invites us many times in the bible. We have come out of the darkness of fear and into the bright light of God<sup>2</sup>. We need not be afraid of people<sup>3</sup> in any way, says God. And if we think that we have to fear God because it says that a number of times in the bible, we need to realise what it really says: to be in awe of.

Jesus says on nearly every page in the New Testament: Fear not; come to me; I forgive you and help you; I am your friend, your father, your brother.... We really do not need to fear the devil, because he was completely defeated<sup>4</sup>. We don't need to fear anything, nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus<sup>5</sup>. And anyway, we have received the Holy Spirit, so that we need no longer live in fear<sup>6</sup>. That does not mean that we should be all proud and haughty<sup>7</sup>, for God resists the proud. The 'Fear not' makes room for amazement, expectation, self-confidence, for faith in

God, in our neighbour, in our own talents. 'Fear not' starts up a very positive development which brings a total change for the better. And with it comes room for creativity, art, development, courage and music.

1 - Daniel 8: 17,18, Isaiah 43:1, Luke 2:10, Revelation 1:17

2 - Ephesians 5:8, 1 Peter 2:9

3 - Isaiah 51:1-16, Isaiah 8:11-13

4 - 1 John 3:8, Ephesians 6:11

5 - Romans 8:35

6 - 2 Timothy 1:6,7,14; 2 Timothy 2:1

7 - Isaiah 3:16-4:1, Isaiah 2:12.

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 11 - Joy

Christians often find it hard to enjoy themselves. They feel they need to work, work, work. And when they do take a rest, that needs to have a purpose, too. They feel guilty if they enjoy themselves on holiday. What nonsense, to think that only children are supposed to be free from worry and have fun.

We can learn something from children, here. Joy is so important for God's children, because it can make us different in this world. In the world people think that joy is to move from one 'high' to the next. But Christians, too, can get a 'kick' out of a 'spiritual high'.

However, joy is being intensely grateful for something that leaves a lasting effect. Let's look at some examples. Jesus held a whole sermon about worrying.<sup>1</sup> A person who worries can't enjoy anything. But God wants us to be free so that we can enjoy ourselves. We should enjoy life, and creation. Isn't a lily more beautiful than Solomon in his best finery? We should enjoy God's righteousness, and his Kingdom. That passage of scripture is meant to bring us so much joy.

Or take the passage where Jesus tells us<sup>2</sup> that we shall knock and it will be opened, and we shall seek and we shall find. So God will give us good things if we ask for them. That brings us peace. Such certainty should give us joy.

Somewhere else Jesus says that we are like sheep sent out among the wolves. That would not be peaceful. But all the same: be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves. A dove plainly enjoys its grain of wheat. So should we, and when the wolves come too close, we fly away. We don't need to let them eat us.

In tense situations we should keep hold of our joy. It struck me that Jesus said, 'Fear not', even during a storm on the middle of a lake. We are short of faith if we are so fearful. A child would trust that his daddy would keep an eye on things and it would continue to keep feeling safe and having fun.

There is a lot we can learn from being in the middle of a storm. One day the Lord sends out His disciples. They become missionaries. He gives a speech in which He says how they should behave and how they should react. Jesus says that they need not fear the devil<sup>5</sup>. That they can have the courage to preach Jesus' words from the roof tops. We don't need to be afraid, for we are more precious than the sparrows. The Lord knows the number of hairs on our heads. That should bring peace in the hustle and bustle of being missionaries. We can even enjoy our fight, our commission, our gifts.

And when we are tired and weary, Jesus invites us to come to Him<sup>6</sup>. We can enter into His rest. He does not give us heavy burdens to bear. When we feel very small and powerless, let's read this text: 'Don't be afraid, little flock, for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'.<sup>7</sup> That passage gives us such worth, courage and power. We can enjoy it because God thinks us worthy of his kingdom. God is full of compassion and mercy<sup>8</sup> towards us. Immanuel: God with us; peace on earth and goodwill to men. The thought that God is not against me, but for me....

Of course, there is no joy if we cannot stand before God in righteousness.<sup>9</sup> In that case, there is no peace, no rest, no joy. But once we have made our peace with God, we can have joy in Him. Wouldn't it be great if Christians were known for their joy in life? And with good reason, for life is a gift from God. Isn't that a creative kind of joy?

1 - Matthew 6:25-35,

2 - Matthew 7:7-11,

3 - Matthew 10:16

4 - Matthew 8:23-27,

5 - Matthew 10:25-31,

6 - Matthew 11:26-30

7 - Luke 12:32,

8 - Isaiah 55:7, Matthew 9:36,

9 - Isaiah 1:13,14, Isaiah 58:6-14, Isaiah 59:8

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 12 - Jesus' character

Jesus' awe-inspiring authority was based on:

- the fact that He was sent and called;
- His complete dependence on God the Father;
- His prayer life.

We can read in the Gospels how He acted and reacted to situations.

Human beings can be very passionate, temperamental, polarised - we want to be right, we want to get our own way. We can often be very self-centred and don't think of others.

Phil 2:1-8: *"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 'Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.'"* Key word: the attitude of Christ (verse 5). Our character and attitude should become like that. That attitude (character, behaviour) in us shines out like a light.

Rom 8:5-9a: *"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."* Key word: fellowship with the Spirit! This fellowship, this attitude, this character brings life and peace.

Some people think that character cannot be shaped. But that is not true. We do it with upbringing and education. Conversion is a strong impulse for a positive change, for don't we surrender ourselves to God who starts to work on us through His Holy Spirit? The more we get to know Him, the more Jesus becomes our role model.

A few questions to ask ourselves:

- What is my own character like?
- have I got an attitude as is mentioned in the letters to the Philippians and the Romans:
- How can I change and become more like Jesus?

2 Cor 10:3-5: *"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*

Obedience provides us with a new amount of character, which will keep us through temptations and trials. We find an example of this in Jesus' life in Matt 4:1-11. It is remarkable that a very special spiritual experience (in this case Jesus' baptism in the Jordan - Matt 3:13-17) is followed by trial/temptation. Jesus stood firm, and we should do no less.

1 Pe 1:6-7: *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."*

1 Pe 4:12-13: *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*

James 1:2-4: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

Col 1:13: *"For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves"*.

Col 2:15: *"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross"*.



As the character of Jesus in us grows, so our character grows stronger and impacts us in our words and deeds.

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 13 - From 'old natures' to a new creation

While we are 'old natures', we cannot please God. The 'old nature' the Bible mentions means: the 'former, unchanged nature'. Our 'humanity', the natural sinful way of thinking and behaving.

Ro 8:5-9: *"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desired, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit, have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God. it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."* So, the old nature can be changed by the Holy Spirit.

Eph 4:17-24: *"So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of god because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and put on the new self, created to be like god in true righteousness and holiness." This speaks of putting off the 'old nature' (verse 22), which is a very personal act of faith.*

- Have we taken the step of putting off the 'old nature'?
- Are we ready for our adventure with God?

Let's read about the wonderful changes which will follow and which will bless both us and those around us.

Col 3:5-17: *"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy langu-*



age from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Verse 7 is the essence of this passage: putting off the old nature - a conscious act, a conscious decision. The essence of the story about the 'old nature' is the fact that sin rules over the old nature and its actions.

#### What is sin?

- Whatever misses its target. Mankind also misses its target. We were created for something different; at the 'fall' the world took a different turning.
- Straying from the straight and just path. We sin against God's rules for our lives almost daily.
- Sometimes it is an almost wilful rebellion against authority. Sin in essence is doing 'our own thing' and not considering God or our neighbour (compare the 10 commandments).

Different aspects of sin:

- Sin against God.
- Sin against our neighbour, cq society.
- Sin against creation.

The fruit of the old nature is the so-called fruit of the flesh:

Gal 5:19-21: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Through reconciliation through Jesus Christ the effect of sin is cancelled. The consequences/results of sin are forgiven and the Holy Spirit can effect a new character and attitude.

#### We become a new creation.

It is not always easy to live as a new creation. Even the well-educated Nicodemus struggled with this.

Jn 3:1-7: "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him'. In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.' 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, You must be born again'." So we need to be born again.

This process of being born again starts with believing in Jesus.

Jn 3:5,15-18: "Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again...that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son'."

Through believing in Jesus we are saved and the spiritual transformation process that makes us a Christian starts there. Out of a changed inner nature come different actions.



2 Cor 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come!"

Gal 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

I hope it has become clear that being a Christian is not the same thing as having one's name on the members' list of a church. It involves being a new creation.

## Questions + remarks:

## Chapter 14 - Living by the Spirit

The Old Testament uses the word *ruach* (Hebrew). This word could be translated as 'breath'. Breath is the sign of life, the breath of life in humans and animals. The word also means 'power to live', something that is actually alive. It can be said of God. Idols (false gods) have no *ruach*, therefore have no power and are a lie. The beginning of a human life is when the breath of life is breathed into him/her. When a person dies, the body returns to the earth (dust) and the *ruach* returns to God who gave that breath of life (Eccl 12:7). The *ruach* is more than the translation 'breath of life' conveys, it also involves people's feelings and thoughts: courage, patience, sadness motivation to act. It could be compared with the *pneuma* in the New Testament (Greek).

1. It can be a power to act - see Matt 26:41: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."
2. There is the natural body: weak, sinful, but the result is a spiritual body in the resurrection: complete - 1 Cor 15:49: "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven", that is, of Jesus.
3. We can pray with the understanding and pray in the spirit; we can praise with the mind and praise in the spirit - 1 Cor 14:15.
4. Jn 4:23-24: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." The Spirit who entered our life affects our worship.
5. Jesus' words have a exceptional power - Jn 6:63: "The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."
6. Ro 8:1-17: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous require-



ments of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

*"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you. "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation - but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father". The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory."*

Verse 1 was what Luther discovered: no more condemnation in Jesus; forgiveness through Jesus; finally free! And that applies to each one of us. But let's not forget the wonderful consequences:

- developing a spiritual attitude (acting like Jesus would have done);
- we become sons of God through the leading of the Holy spirit;
- the Holy Spirit empowers us with authority.

7. The Holy Spirit empowers - Acts 1:8: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* (Compare Acts 4:33, Ro 15:19, Gal 3:5, Eph 3:16, 2 Tim 1:7) Power to bear witness, power to act; authority to make things happen.

a) The Holy Spirit gives us a specific life (see, among others, Gal 5:25, 2 Cor 13:4, Gal 2:20, 1 Jn 4:9).

b) The Holy Spirit gives us special blessings, for example: special gifts of the Spirit that we can desire (1 Cor 14:1). Those gifts are named in a Cor 12:1,4-11: *"Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant....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. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as He determines."*

c) But those gifts must **never** become a reason for division among believers! For the real evidence of the Holy Spirit is unity! 1 Cor 12:12-14, 18-20, 25-27: *"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.....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..... 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. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

Something has gone wrong if certain gifts distract us from the unity, serving one another and the congregation and therefore the kingdom of God. Unfortunately some people become arrogant as a result of having the fullness of the Holy Spirit/His gifts. Like: 'You must notice me!' That is not right!

d) The Holy Spirit has special tasks. 1 Cor 12:28-31: *"And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in diffe-*



rent kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. "Eph 4:11-15: "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."

That last passage it states again very clearly the purpose of the gifts and tasks: it is for serving, for building up, for unity, for growth, for maturity.

e) The Holy Spirit gives fruits, and these are very different from the fruits (results) of our human nature. Gal 5:16-22: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

d) This fits in with the work of the Kingdom of God which emphasises righteousness, peace, joy, solidarity. Ro 14:17-19: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."

e) Eph 1:13: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit has sealed us. So no earthly power can break that and destroy our eternal life.

f) 2 Tim 1:14: "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you - guard

it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us". That verse is such an encouragement.

g) The Holy Spirit is referred to as the spirit of truth in various places. That helps us to see things in the right light, and we can be real and honest with each other. (See also Jn 14:17, Jn 15:26, Jn 16:13).

h) 2 Cor 1:20-21: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." God's Spirit in our life is a sure sign of our total salvation and eternal life.

i) 2 Cor 3:16-18: "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." God's Spirit gives us real freedom, every pressure, oppression and cover-up is removed and we may reflect God's glory, which is a process, a gradual changing.

j) Everyone who believes or confesses that Jesus is the Lord, does so as a result of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

k) The Holy Spirit gives a special spiritual authority. For example, look how Jesus resisted temptations, and drove out demons. We see the same thing later in the believers, the apostles, etc.

### How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

Jn 7:37-39: "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not yet been glorified."

In other words, we can pray for it and receive it. We don't need to be particularly holy, or to know the whole Bible by heart, or to fast for weeks. We can come, pray, take and receive.



## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 15 - Conversion as a lifestyle

Is 1:11-20: “‘The multitude of your sacrifices - what are they to me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbaths and convocations - I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood, wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us reason together’, says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are as red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land, but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken’.”

Amos 5:21-24: “I hate, I despise your religious feasts, I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

These verses speak of praise, and isn't that what we do? But in this particular context God appears to hate praise. (Even though He Himself was the originator of praise.) God does, of course, want our praise offering, so long as things are right in our personal lives. Believing and living it are the same thing. So:

1. How do we behave during a church gathering, on the stage. Are we the same person back stage, at home, at work, in family circles, when we're out, when we go on holiday.
2. So: how do we behave towards the poor, the minorities, widows, orphans, people on their own, old age pensioners, nature, etc. Do read the



letter of James in the New Testament which underlines it all exactly: if our attitude towards our neighbour is correct and we lay down our lives for him/her, we can bring our praise offering wholeheartedly.

3. In the gospels we read of Jesus' attitude towards women, disadvantaged people, the poor, the weak, the sick, etc. We can and should follow Jesus. And we bear a true witness by praying, confessing, and by living out this evangelistic lifestyle.

Evangelism is the message that Jesus brings us the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom that turns everything upside down, even the present. Through conversion we become part of that Kingdom. (Unlike many people think), conversion is not a one-time turn-around to believe in Jesus, although, of course, it is part of conversion: Believing in Jesus, praying to Him daily, but then: following Him which is where it all starts. Living with Jesus is a daily conversion, a daily challenge to decide to act like Jesus would have done.

Matt 28:16-20: *"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'."*

2 Pe 3:9: *"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

Matt 5:13-16: *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

The great commission is to go about our business as witnesses to God's

Kingdom while being light that shines (clear and bright) and salt that tastes salty (hidden, unnoticed).

Our praise can be clear and bright, too.

A lot has been said, and done, about praise and worship over the last few years (for example, at worship & renewal conferences, etc), but is that the only real praise and worship? No, no matter how good certain forms of worship are, worshipping involves far more than that, and can be expressed in far more ways. It is important to remind ourselves that praise and worship is a **lifestyle**:

- We can praise God in music, singing, dancing, the arts.
- We can worship God in the spoken word.
- We can praise God on paper (poetry, prose).
- We can worship God in our actions.
- Creation (clouds, mountains, trees) praises God.
- Animals praise God (see Revelation).

Let's be mindful of the Old Testament warning in which God says, "Remove the music of your harps and your songs, because of your unrighteousness."

True worship is concerned with how we live, what we do, how we exercise righteousness. We can sing wholeheartedly, once we are living righteously.

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 16 - Priesthood (Serving the body, the church)

*"Out of love for us, Jesus, by His death, freed us from our sins, and made us kings, priests for God, His Father." (Rev 1:6 - the 'Good News' Bible).*

While the priesthood was reserved for a selected few in the Old Testament, the New Testament teaches us that all Christians are priests and kings for God. This carries an enormous responsibility. If we are priests, we have to behave like priests. What does that mean?

Generally speaking, we could say that priests fulfil a mediating function. In the Old Testament the priests took care of the offerings and taught God's instructions to the people. To find out specific details regarding what was expected of the priests, we should read the book of Leviticus. This mediating function is three-way:

- From God to the people: it was the job of the priests to make God's character known to the people.
- From the people to God: the priests brought the people's needs to God, as an advocate before God's throne.
- Between people (reconciliating, judging, praying).

Priesthood is part of discipleship. A priest does not live just for himself. He leads the people in worship, and puts God at the centre. Which is what we should do.

1 Pe 2:1-10: *"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to Him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him - 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. For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.' Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.' And, 'A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined for. 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. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God, once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy."*

Reading through this passage we notice a number of things:

- To be a priest means to live out of grace and mercy.
- We are specifically called to be a holy priesthood bringing spiritual offerings, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

How do we cope with this responsibility? To us it might seem an impossible command. And indeed, for us sinful people it is impossible to please God. But we read that our priesthood pleases God through Jesus Christ. The Bible states very clearly that Jesus is a priest, too. The most wonderful aspect of Jesus' priesthood is that He offered Himself and showed us an example of what that priesthood means.

However, His priesthood entails more:

Heb 4:14-16a: *"We have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the son of God. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet without sin. Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence..."*

Heb 7:25: *"Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them."*

Priesthood is clearly a dimension of discipleship that means that we are to serve and to live holy lives. We should not go and hide in a corner, but we know that we have a sure foundation on which we can build. For Jesus pleads our cause - isn't that wonderful? Our mediator may seem far away, for Jesus is in heaven, but He left us His Holy Spirit, who is our friend and will never leave us. Living as priests, therefore, means living by the Holy Spirit, in a close relationship with God, but also supported by God.

**All** believers are called to be priests. Do we realise exactly what that means? We don't have to become superspiritual beings. Jesus compares God's kingdom with a mustard seed. It starts very small but it soon grows into a tree in which birds can find shelter (Lu 13:18-19). The same



applies to us as disciples: we grow!

As disciples we have the opportunity to be priests in our environment. "Chosen, called by God to bring His love to others". So how can we say that life as a Christian is boring, or meaningless?

Something about Levitical priests: the "Levites". They had an extra job: "the praise offering". The kings, David and Solomon, initiated this. How did the Levites do this? They gave their very best for the very Highest: utmost motivation, great commitment, much practice, great ability and high quality. The same challenging call to Levitical priesthood applies to us.. (A more complete explanation can be found in the book "Finale, Biblical view on music").

We are called into service. Service is nothing more than specialism, a particular task. **All** believers receive a service of reconciliation.

2 Cor 5:18-19: *"All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation."*

All of us are called by God into a priestly service worthy of a Levite! If we take that as a starting point, we will grow and bear fruit. (See Eph 4:1-2, 2 Tim 1:9, Heb 3:1, 2 Pe 1:10).

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 17 - Gehazi was no prophet

When reading about Elisha's life, we come across the name of his servant Gehazi a few times. Just as Elisha was Elijah's servant, so Gehazi was Elisha's servant. So how come Elisha did become a prophet - following in Elijah's footsteps in calling and service - and Gehazi did not?

Three examples from Gehazi's life will make things clearer. Thanks to a word from Elisha a Sunamese woman had a son. This boy came to die untimely. The woman travelled to Elisha and when she arrived she fell on Elisha's feet. Gehazi wanted to throw the woman out.<sup>1</sup> He could not see the woman's bitter grief. Gehazi completely lacked the ability to identify with other people's lives and feelings and did not have any compassion, love or care. Elisha tells Gehazi to put his staff on the dead boy's face. He returns with the message that the boy did not wake up.<sup>2</sup> The way in which all this happened shows that he lacked faith.

After Naaman was cured, Elisha refused any reward for his services. However, Gehazi runs after Naaman and under false pretences he receives precious gifts from Naaman.<sup>3</sup> This clearly shows greed and jealousy. Musicians, artists, but also up-and-coming leaders should take care not to become like Gehazi. On the surface it appeared that Gehazi had everything: the right position, as Elisha's pupil his potential successor, in God's service. But his heart was not right. There was no real life, no patience, no real power, no compassion, no honest motivation. Gehazi was after the *status* of a prophet rather than *being* a prophet. This is often a potential problem to those who go before and those who follow after. And yet the latter can become greater than the former. Look at Elisha, who did greater things than Elijah. But it does depend on the heart's attitude - wrong in Gehazi, right in Elisha. Elisha continued on in the same power as Elijah; he asked for a double portion and he received it, too.<sup>4</sup> Elisha was after the essence, as a symbol he received Elijah's prophet's cloak. Gehazi disappears into history without fame and leprous.

Where are the artists and singers, to pick up the prophet's cloak? Those are the ones who will not lust for status, but will go in the power of God.

1 - 2 Kings 4:27,

2 - 2 Kings 4:31,



## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 18 - God can use us

We can have all kinds of ideas on whom God will use. We often think that we need to be some sort of super-giant but the Bible shows us something different.

- Gideon was a coward;
- Moses was not a public speaker;
- Jonah was afraid of people;
- Peter was a fanatic;
- Thomas was a doubter;
- David was a shepherd;
- Simon the Zealot was a rebel;
- Zaccheus was a traitor.

Where do we come on this list? God used ordinary people. Faith grew in their heart, they changed and God used them. In the same way, God will give us talents and want to use us.

Matt 25: 14-30: *"Again, it will be like man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master', he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and*



*gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*

Watch out: burying our talents, doing nothing with them, was condemned by the lord in this parable. And those who worked with their talent(s), matured and increased.

- What about us? Shall we hide ourselves or accept the challenge, commit ourselves and be used by God?
- Heb 10:35,36 speaks of perseverance: *"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised."*

We could say, 'I am not old enough'. But God encourages us so much! Look what was said to Timothy, who was only a teenager:

1 Tim 4:12: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity."*

We might think 'how can I lead people to Jesus'. Let's look at the following honest account that the apostle Paul gives of himself. He was an unbeliever and a persecutor of Christians. By being honest about ourselves rather than painting a nicer picture of ourselves than is truthful, we can win people for Jesus!

Acts 26:9-23: *"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.*

*"On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O King, as I was on*

*the road, I saw a bright light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'*

*"Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

*"So, then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen - that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."*

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 19 - Be yourself

Who exactly are we? We are unique. There is no-one like us, that was God's intention: for every human being to be unique. This means that we are born with certain gifts and talents. The parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) teaches us that we should not bury our talents, but that we should develop them. That brings glory to God. Such a process of development is not without obstacles. Circumstances can be against us: our family might prefer us to choose something else, the wrong choice of study, unsuitable friends (peer pressure), frustrations, etc. Always remember "who we are in Christ".

Around the time of puberty, many of us go through a time when we would prefer to go unnoticed. This can influence the choice of company we keep: we can be guided by what clothes people wear: brands like Nike, Adidas, Levi's, and so on. During such a phase we prefer not to stand out in the crowd. And yet there is something unique about us, and we are meant to grow up into the unique personality God had intended us to become. Which does not mean that we should behave in a disturbing manner (being rude, crude, cynical, arrogant, etc): James 4:6: "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*". It is good to be ourselves without going too far and considering ourselves above others, which is sin. Arrogance can easily lead to intolerance and even racism - obviously not fruits of God's Spirit.

2 Cor 5:17: "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come!*" Being ourselves as a new creation. 'En route' together with God, a guarantee for positive development, unique and beautiful. And finally: when it is difficult to find God's uniqueness in someone else look for the fruit which shows whether the tree is good (Matt 5:15-16). And, because fruit takes time to grow, let's be patient with ourselves and with others.

### Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 20- Testing questions

In order to further ourselves as people and to mature in God, we need to be honest with ourselves.

A number of questions to ponder:

1. We so readily say that we are 'en route' for Jesus. But how much of it is due to the attractive prospect of adventure and being on the stage? Nothing wrong with that! But let's be honest about our drive and motivation. We need to be alert to negative motives, like striving after recognition; fanaticism; overconfidence.
2. How about 'forcing issues'? Forcing the message down people's throats leads nowhere. 1 Tim 2:3-6: "*This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time.*" Note that 'proper time', which is the right moment, and not some inconvenient moment. Are we taking that to heart? We need to develop sensitivity.
3. Are our pure motives recognised by others, like our partner, leader, youth leader, friends, family?
4. Being active means serving. Note how Jesus did that: Phil 2:5-7: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."
5. Dare we let go of our securities, our 'culture', our way of life and work, our knowledge, and consider others better than ourselves? Phil 2:1-5: "*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of*



*Christ Jesus."*

6. Sometimes we may have to part with luxury, our own way, money, hygiene, our own time-keeping, which can be quite a 'culture shock', but which are all part of the adventure. Note what happened to Paul in Phil 4:11-13: *"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."*

7. Sometimes we have to effect a complete 'culture shift'. We can only communicate with others if we do so in their communication framework. 1 Cor 9:19-22: *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."*

8. How do we handle disappointments? If they make us bitter, we could poison both our own life and that of others. Are we able to forgive? Can we draw a line and start again. Are we prepared for a few knocks from life? Christians, too, may disappoint us! The only one who never lets us down is God. Mark 11:25-26: *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. However, if you do not forgive others, your Father in heaven will not forgive you yours sins either)."*

Matt 18:32-35: *"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of your because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

Heb 12:15: *"See to it that no-one misses the grace of God and that no*

*bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."*

9. Are we prepared (just when we begin to be successful) to give God all the glory? Of course we may be pleased when everything goes well, but we need to keep both feet firmly on the ground. Is 42:8: *"I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."* Jn 8:50: *"I am not seeking glory for myself."*

10. And the last of these 10 honest questions: Am I putting it all into practice at home, at work, at school?

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 21 - I feel....

Recent years have seen quite a change in our views on mankind and the world. Where we used to say "I think that things are like this or like that", we now say, "I feel that things are like this or like that". A huge change from objectivity to subjectivity. Rationality has its drawbacks, but if our social framework is founded on feelings, we might end up with a hysterical society.

The same danger is sneaking up on faith.

- People want to feel that God exists;
- Through praise people want to feel so good emotionally that it makes them think that God exists;
- "I feel that God exists" has replaced "I know ...."

The Bible strongly warns against this:

2 Cor 5:7: *"We live by faith, not by sight."* The root of the word "sight" used here is an expression that includes all types of feelings and observations. *"We live by faith"*. (Ro 9:30-33, Ro 10:8-11, Gal 2:20, Ro 3:28, Eph 3:17, etc).

- What do we live by? Do emotions dictate our actions, or do we want to live and act by faith?
- How can we put that into practice: What are the facts?
- Therefore: It is not what we feel, but who we are, that determines the situation/our life. And we can be who Jesus was. There are some remarkable sayings: among other things, Jesus says:
- I am the living bread;
- I am the Alpha and the Omega;
- I am the first and the last.

He is who He is, not what He feels.

This presents us with a real choice: to decide to become who we are and not what we feel.

We might say: "That is the way I am, I can't help it". That is untrue. Our conversion and the work of God's Spirit in our lives makes us into different, new, stable people.

If we surrender to our feelings, we become unstable, which would make it increasingly harder to reach any goals.

See James 1:5-8: *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."*

Eph 4:14-15: *"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 schemes. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ."*

It can be important not to let the circumstances dictate to us what we feel:

- Paul and Silas sang God's praises in prison (Acts 16:25).
- Phil 4:4a: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. And again I say, Rejoice!"*
- 1 Pe 4:13: *"But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*
- James 1:2: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."*
- Jn 16:32: *"But a time is coming and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me."*
- Ro 12:12: *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."*

**Therefore, we need to live by faith!**

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 22 - Prayer

In this chapter we will look at some practical matters that could might benefit our spiritual life.

### 1. What is prayer

Praying is 'talking' with God. It can be out loud, audible, or it can be silent, on the inside. It can be done without words (in our own 'quiet time'). It can be done without any pomp, without particular words or 'spiritual formulae', we can come to God as we are. And it can be done wherever we are, whatever we feel like, and whatever we are doing. Sometimes prayer is talking to God, at other times it might be a shout out of great need. All of the above is OK!

Some passages about prayer:

Matt 6:5-13: *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. This, then, is how you should pray:*

*'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread, forgive us our debts  
As we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.'  
(For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.)' "*

Eph 2:18: *"For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit."*

Jn 15:16: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."*

Matt 18:19-20: *Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*

Jn 16: 23-24: *"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

Eph 3:20-21: *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*

1 Thess 5:17: *"Pray without ceasing."*

James 5:13: *"Is any of you in trouble? Let him pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise."*

Acts 1:14: *"They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."*

Ro 1:9: *"God whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers."*

Phil 4:6: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

James 5:16: *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."*

Part of praying is listening. Someone once said, after reading the story of Samuel, that he was a little ashamed of his praying. Instead of 'Speak Lord, your servant is listening', his prayer had been more like 'Be silent, Lord, your servant is speaking'.

### 2. How do we hear God speak?

God appears to speak in many different manners:

- He speak to us in our thoughts;
- He speaks from the Bible (a certain passage 'lights up');



- He speaks through other people;
- He speak through things that happen;
- He speaks through nature.

We need to learn to recognise His voice, which is not always easy.

### 3. Answered prayer

This may well depend on our idea of God. If we think of Him as some sort of Santa Claus, then we are expecting presents! Only God is not Santa Claus. So if we expect Santa-type answers, we could become disappointed in God. We ourselves are at fault, for God is no Santa-god. So what is our idea of God (our view of/expectation from God)?

There are some remarkable answers to prayer in the Bible. They are mentioned because they are unusual and not an everyday occurrence.

- People get miraculously freed from prison. (And yet some believers are murdered in prison). This is like a contradiction, but the fact is that God has a unique path mapped out for each person.

Heb 11:32-38: *"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."*

Finally, let's not let our prayer not depend on our expectations. Let's keep pouring out our heart to God, for He wants 'to pray to Him'.

Phil 4:6: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

### 4. The prayer of blessing

Very different, but very powerful, is the prayer of blessing. It can be invisibly done from our inner rooms. We can (and should) bless our enemies, we should bless those who make our lives uncomfortable. We can see from the Bible how we can bless situations, and even things! How does that work? The Old Testament shows examples of this, like the way Jacob blessed his twelve sons, or how Abraham blessed Isaac and Ishmael. It is like saying, 'Lord Jesus, in your name I bless .....'. By doing so, we place the particular person or situation in the blessing attention of God. We can do that every day, which will let us relax our own tight hold, which will enable us to let go and let God do His work. Even if it takes months, the change will come. By blessing them we wish the best on others. Isn't that the best thing we can do for anyone?

### 5. The greatest prayer

*"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. This, then, is how you should pray:*

***'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread, forgive us our debts  
As we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.'  
(For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
Forever and ever. Amen.)'***

*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." - Matt 6:5-15.*

This great prayer has great power! It can never be prayed enough!

### Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 23 - Practice

We will look briefly at a number of issues often raised by people. As they are so clear in the Bible, let's not spend long bible studies on them:

### 1. How do we know that we are saved?

- by giving our lives to Jesus (action);
- the Bible confirms in many passages that God's mercy provides for our shortcomings (sins);
- such certainties are different from what our 'feelings' dictate;
- It is not: once saved, always saved. Just as loving our partner requires daily renewal, so our life with God needs daily salvation (consciously turning towards a life with God).

Commitment (to the Lord) is endeavouring to act daily like a Disciple of Jesus would.

### 2. How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

The Bible shows us many ways: prayer, blessing, laying on of hands, etc, etc. It is quite simple: by asking God. (As proof, do we suddenly need to be able to speak in tongues? Answer: no. Some have that gift, others have different gifts - cf 1 Cor 12).

### 3. Do we need to have been baptised to be saved?

Answer: No. Many believed in God (both OT and NT - see Hebrews) and their faith was reckoned to them as righteousness. Our salvation is by faith, not by baptism.

### 4. What should we do when we are afraid?

Fear can have many causes, for example things that have happened in our past. Or we can feel threatened by a particular situation. All the same: the perfect love of God drives out all fear. Remedy: To keep opening ourselves up to God's love.

AND: we have the armour of God to keep us standing firm.

### 5. We have too little faith

Is that true? If we have faith like a mustard seed, we can move mountains. No doubt we have more faith than a mustard seed. Do we want more faith? Let's ask for it, it is a gift from God, so we should receive it.

### 6. We can't see God's guidance for our life.

God's guidance is always there. Occasionally it can be quite exceptional (examples in the Bible). But very often God's guidance is barely noticeable, like a soft breeze. We don't receive it by constantly asking for signs and wonders. A Bible passage might 'jump out at us'. Or something becomes very clear through particular circumstances (from which we can draw a conclusion). Very often we need to use our common sense. And let's not be too trusting when people come and tell us, "God told me that you.....". If God wants you to know something, He is quite capable of telling you Himself.

### 7. Have I got any talents, and if so, how do I develop them?

Every person has talents. Often more than we realise. Talents (whatever they are: making the coffee, doing the household, cooking, organising parties, being artistic, caring for the sick or the old, working with children, painting, gardening, making music, management, and so on) are developed by practice, practice, and more practice. Practice makes perfect! The parable of the talents teaches us that we must not sit at home doing nothing, but that we should become active. That will cause our talents to grow, and our life to become interesting; all of which glorifies God.

### 8. Is the devil real and should I fear him?

Yes, the devil exists. Both in the OT and the NT he is mentioned regularly. He is the origin of much evil. And yet he can do nothing if people won't listen to him. We, as believers, are sealed by the Holy Ghost (Eph 1:13) and in Jesus we are more than conquerors (Ro 8:37), so we need not fear evil. Whether evil is allowed power depends on the choices we make, eg if we let something happen.

James 4:7: *"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you".*

We should not blame the devil for the influence of negative group behaviour (like gossiping and slander), for example. No, we ourselves need to stop such unrighteousness (2 Tim 2:19), we should refuse to join in. Even when temptation is not around every corner, we need to stay alert (Mk 13:33, 1 Cor 16:13, Col 4:2, 1 Pe 5:8). (See also CHAPTER TEN - Fear not.)

### 9. The issue of suffering

- Some things just happen (coincidence);



- Some things are allowed (like in Job);
- Some things happen because we did not watch out;
- Some events are caused by evil;
- Some wrong choices have awful consequences (like David's sin with Bathsheba);
- Much suffering in this world is the consequence of consciously sinful choices by people, like hunger and diseases in countries as a result of deforestation, like industrial pollution causing animals and people to get sick or even die.

So when we ask the question, "If God exists, then how come .....", it would be worth considering the above mentioned points and look a bit deeper into the issues. One thing is certain: God desires our good. (Ps 145:9, Micah 6:8, 1 Tim 4:4).

What do **we** offer as comfort when we are faced with suffering?

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 24 - Quality

1 Chron 16:37, 41-42: *"David left Asaph and his associates before the ark of the covenant of the Lord to minister there regularly, according to each day's requirements..... With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the Lord, 'for his love endures forever'. Heman and Jeduthun were responsible for the sounding of the trumpets and cymbals and for the playing of the other instruments for sacred song. The sons of Jeduthun were stationed at the gate."*

1 Chron 16:4-6: *"He (David) appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel: Asaph was the chief, Zechariah second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Odeb-Edom and Jeiel. They were to play the lyres and harps, Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God."*

Now that the ark has its own particular place, David chooses from among the Levites (who were also chosen) those who were to practise praise and music. "The very best" were appointed by name rather than accidentally by chance. These were the elect, they were very special people. What was required of them was a continuous service which required people with special qualities. This was not some repetitive and boring job; there were many instruments and there was percussion. The whole was very dynamic and very special. This special musical occurrence took place in a special place, i.e. before the ark, which means before the face of God. So, in every respect: superlative. But let's not get discouraged from reading about all this.

Are we as special as that, and is our ability such that we may do such a musical service? We can answer that for ourselves. Has the Lord called us by name?<sup>1</sup>

Do we know the Lord personally? Are we prepared to serve continuously, our whole lives, without holding back?<sup>2</sup> Are we prepared to serve dynamically and avoid getting set in our ways? In other words: do we serve creatively?<sup>3</sup> Are we doing it before the face of God? Are we doing what we are doing for Him only, and not for personal gain, honour or glory?<sup>4</sup> We can answer that for ourselves, too. And we need to be honest. Where there is doubt, or if our service does not meet God's



standard, we can turn to the Lord and his grace and mercy can change us.

Of course we need to practise to acquire musical excellence. If we asked God for the ability to play the piano beautifully because we have talent, the answer would be: 'Go and enrol in the nearest school for music'.

That combination of spiritual attitude with quality (abilities, excellence) is very striking. 'Our utmost for the highest': God deserves our best and that means: practice, practice and more practice - which will glorify God.

- 1 - Rev 3:20,
- 2 - Matt 16:24-26, Gal 5:24-25,
- 3 - 2 Cor 10:17-18, Gal 6:15-16, Ro 7:6,
- 4 - 1 Pe 2:16, 1 Pe 4:10,11, Jn 12:26,
- 5 - Ro 12:1-2, Jn 20:21

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 25 - Fed up with music

Amos 5:23-24: *"Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"*

God could well be quite fed up with our music sometimes: gospel groups, gospel combo's, gospel bands, gospel choirs, gospel books, gospel records, gospel music, gospel organisations, gospel.....Gospel blessing or curse??

The prophet Amos says it quite succinctly: The Lord has had enough of meetings, feasts and offerings (Amos 5:21-22, 8:10), because something essential is lacking and it has become untrue, unreal and unnatural. The feasts and offerings are held according to the rules, but the Lord abhors them.

A little later Amos repeats his quite strong accusation (Amos 6:5-6): *"You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph."*

One preacher, who was strongly anti-music, used this passage persuasively to show that musical instruments were totally unnecessary and modern musical instruments were the devil's tools, like the bass guitar and the synthesiser.....

But that is not what these passages are about.

David invented all kinds of instruments and God was very happy with them, but that was because David's attitude before God was right. That is what these verses are concerned with. Amos's musicians were only after organising parties so they could show off new instruments (some gospel choirs like to do this, too). They were not concerned with real needs, like righteousness and justice.

Such concerns are only possible when in our hearts we know a deep relationship with the Saviour - only He is righteous and He wants to fill us with that righteousness. Our musical efforts will not become a blessing until we have His righteousness.



Let's have a good look in the mirror. What are we like, our group, our choir, our band? Are our hearts truly right before God? Are we justified by Jesus?<sup>1</sup> Is that our experience? Are we concerned with the injustice in this world? If not, those verses from Amos might be applicable to us.

The prophet Malachi accuses the Levitical priests (the Levites offered the praises):

*"A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me? If I am a master, where is the respect due to me?" says the Lord Almighty. 'It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. But you ask "How have we shown contempt for your name?" You place defiled food on my altar. But you ask, "How have we defiled you?" By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible.' (Amos 1:6-7).*

Quite an accusation! In Mal 1:7-2:9 more comes to light. The priests lack respect and awe. They are muddling on. The sacrificial animals - which should be perfect - are crippled or sick - imperfect! The offering service is imperfect and so are the priests. These priests desecrate the Lord's service. Which makes a nonsense of expecting the Lord to show mercy or answer prayers. The Lord is displeased and He curses those who do this evil. (Mal 1:14)

Mal 2:1-2: *"And now this admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honour my name', says the Lord Almighty, 'I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honour me.'"*

It is obvious that the Levites had lost the plot. Their attitude said: It doesn't matter, it is only for the Lord. What a disrespectful attitude! But God will not be treated like that. He is awesome (Mal 1:14b). Honour and respect are His due. Which is quite different from fear. We do not need to fear God, if we relate to Him properly, if we know that we are saved through Christ.<sup>2</sup> If we don't, then our offering is sick and imperfect. We need to be careful.

Still later, Malachi has another look at the purpose and tasks of the Levites. In a few verses he expresses himself very clearly! Mal 2:4-5: *"And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that my covenant with Levi may continue", says the Lord Almighty. 'My covenant was*

*with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him'."* Malachi then expands on that gift (Mal 2:6-7): *"True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from their sin. For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction - because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty."*

Malachi shows us very clearly what God expects of us. It will be good and we should apply the same to our gospel group or choir. And if something does not comply with God's expectation, let's work on it and sort it out! These verses should be in every choir's constitution. God warns us<sup>3</sup> against ignoring this contract. Gospel music is great, singing in a choir is wonderful, praising with enthusiasm is commendable, so long as the way we do it shows its purpose. We need to be consistent in our service; not deny God the honour and respect that is due to Him; our praise offering must not be imperfect. We need to realise that we are God's messengers<sup>4</sup>. And we need to concern ourselves with the serious issues of the poor and destitute, justice and righteousness. What a wonderful calling - the positive flipside of the coin!

1 - Ro 5:21, 14:17, 3:23-26, 5:1, 1Jn 2:29

2 - Jn 10:9, Acts 4:12, Eph 2:5, Heb 7:25

3 - Mal 2:8-9

4 - 2 Cor 3:2-3.

## Questions & remarks:



## Chapter 26 - Can't quite get it right.....

*"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others, 'We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn'. (1)*

Life here on earth must have been quite depressing for the Lord. No matter what happened, people would not listen. Whether the music was joyful or sad, rock or traditional, no-one listened. This verse should warn us against arguing about forms and styles. The question we should ask is why there is no response. One of the drawbacks of the gospel message is that the cross attracts only a few, while many take offence. No matter how beautifully we perform and how nicely we dress it all up, whether it is rock or renaissance, many only come to be entertained and are not open to the message of the music.

*"To them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice."*<sup>2</sup>

Those of use who desire to minister in music, need to be aware of this. It is about the purpose of what we do, not the success rate. It is very easy just to look for the so-called results, or the quality of the performance, the size of the audience, the tone of the piano, the condition of the dressing rooms, the sales of the CD or the opportunity to get on radio or TV, rather than for the purpose of the whole event. Different people will give different answers. But it is good to question our motives relating to meetings, performances, concerts, etc.

Of course, it is wonderful if people respond well - Jesus does not like a lukewarm attitude in people.<sup>3</sup>

1 - Matt 11:16-17, Lu 7:31-32

2 - Ez 33:31-33

3 - Matt 11:18-24, Rev 3:15-16

### Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 27 - Involvement

The Levites were the singers in the Bible (OT).

In the New Testament we find only two stories about Levites. The first can be found in Luke 1 and is the story of the good Samaritan. Jesus told it to show what real neighbourly love was. The second person who passed by the poor victim was a Levite.

This Levite must have been in a hurry, trying to get to the choir's rehearsal on time. Hadn't God commissioned him to sing? Surely he had to choose in favour of that calling. Of course he could have got involved, but that might have endangered his commission - which he considered to be out of the question.

This Levite is a typical example of someone whose job comes before all else, someone who lives for the task he has to perform. For all kind of plausible reasons he cannot see the action that needs to take priority over everything else. He must have lost his love and concern for people. Music which had been the means to an end, had become the end itself. He had no compassion left, and lost all perspective. He had lost his value in God's kingdom, no matter how beautifully he sang.

The second story about a Levite is found in Acts 2. His name was Joseph. This particular Levite owned a piece of land. When he noticed that there was a need in the first christian community, he sold that land and gave the profits to the church to provide for the needs of its members. Rightly, this Joseph had the nickname: Barnabas, which means 'son of comfort'. This second Levite, also a singer, was totally involved with the cares of those around him. He had compassion and love for his fellow-men. His was no lip-service - he served God with action.

Two different Levites. Two totally opposite worlds. We come across both kinds of singers, conductors, musicians. People do not automatically belong to the one category or the other. There is no such thing as fate pre-destining that for us. It is our own decision whether we pass by or get involved and give comfort.

Let's hope that today's Levites are 'sons of comfort'. Full of love for people, full of compassion, totally involved, full of the Holy Spirit rather



than living in ivory towers concerned only with their own jobs.

1 - Lu 10:29-37

2 - Acts 4:36-37

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 28 - Responsibility

1 Pe 3:8-18: *"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For,*

*'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'*

*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."*

Some believers think that they need to keep on praying and waiting until God whispers something in their ear or until they receive a miraculous sign. They might be in for a long wait. God does not usually work like that. The Lord has delivered us, saved us, reconciled us, and put us back on our feet. He has given us the opportunity to develop our gifts, to become who we really are, to take responsibility for ourselves and live in the true freedom Jesus provided for us.

And look what we are capable of achieving. Let's read about Esther, Daniel and many others: what they were able to achieve because they committed themselves and took responsibility for themselves.

What are we going to do with our lives now that we have become mature believers? And let's not forget that we need to approach every task as though we were doing it for the Lord. Col 3:17: *"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."*



That makes being a missionary equally important as being a good manager. And preaching just as important as being good parents. Being a good politician or academic is just as important as counselling or doing social work. That is why the Lord invites us to take hold of our lives, to make our own unique choices and take up our responsibility. We honour God by doing so.

God does not promise us a calm journey, but He does promise us a safe arrival!

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 29 - On the road

Prov 3:56: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."

Undoubtedly we have questions about our lives, our future, or the tour we are going on. How will it all go? Are we really doing God's will? Will He really guide us?

God promises us guidance, but that guidance comes with a few requirements:

- Tell God everything (through prayer);
- Try to listen to Him (through meditation, bible reading, recognising situations);
- Get going. A ship that is not out at sea cannot respond to its rudder. Even if we are a bit unsure, we should get going.

Jn 14:6: "*Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'*"

Jer 7:23: "*But I gave them this command: 'Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you'.*"

Is 30:21: "*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'.*" And people **do** walk in it. The book of Acts tells us that the first believers were called '*people of the way*' (Acts 9:2, 18:25, 19:9, 24:14). They put into practice what Jesus taught them. They looked after the poor, the widows, the sick, the destitute.

Heb 10:20-24 tells of '*a new and living way*' in which we should provoke each other to '*love and good works*'.

These examples should encourage us to get involved in social action: to be a Christian - which has been the most effective testimony throughout the centuries and is quite different from forcing the gospel down people's throats through the use of jargon and slogans. Word and deed should be in agreement. If we think that evangelism is just a verbal testimony, the



result might be verbal violence like: 'if you don't repent, you will go to hell'. That may sound quite straight and radical, but is untrue. What exactly is repentance? How does God view a particular situation or person? What about God's compassion and mercy? Eternal reality has more nuances. Are we just looking for an opportunity to say proudly that 'we told them straight'? But Jesus was not like that - look how compassionate and understanding He was. He was sharp and direct to the spiritual leaders, but not to the people. Jesus asks us to walk in His way and show the same mercy He showed. Help is available to us:

- We need to trust in God (Jer 17:7)
- We need to trust in His word (Ps 119:105)
- We have His Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12)
- We can ask God for wisdom and insight (James 1:5-7)

Let's persevere on the road (Heb 10:36), walking in the way Jesus showed us. It will be a great blessing both to ourselves and to others.

## Questions & remarks:

## Chapter 30- How to move on?

John Fisher is a well-known American author and composer. His gospel songs were quite famous in the 70s and 80s. For many years, he contributed to the CCM - an American christian music magazine. The following is an amended version of a story he wrote:

'A man was travelling in quite bad weather conditions. A large building in a town square caught his attention. The door was open, and the light, music, sounds and warmth could be noticed from outside the building. He was drawn towards it like a magnet. As he came closer, he could clearly read the words above the door: "THE KINGDOM OF GOD". He entered the building expectantly.

Once inside, he found himself in a large hall - it was busy like a beehive. Many doors led out this hall, and there was a lot of coming and going; there was much going on behind all those doors. Just as he was about to ask for directions someone asked him if he was on THE WAY..... people gave him flyers and a big book called THE BIBLE (which he tried to read but couldn't understand). A queue of people walked through the door on the right, so he decided to join them. He saw a group of people singing with guitars (he thought it was a bit loud). Someone asked him if he was 'saved'. He felt quite safe there, so he said 'yes' after which the stranger hugged him with enthusiasm and, after being given a few more flyers, he entered the first room.

It was like a stadium full of people. They were singing (he didn't know the songs, but it sounded quite nice), and after a while a man started speaking, so he sat down. The man spoke beautifully about heaven. Hell was a nasty place where no-one wants to go and you had to follow a certain Jesus. Suddenly many people went down to the front. He thought that it had all finished so he joined them.

They all ended up in a second room where yet more people started to talk and pray. Before he was able to open his mouth, he found himself sitting at a table, in between two people who said how wonderful it was that he wanted to be converted and who started to pray for him straight away. He was to repeat some sentences they prayed after which they hugged him and told him that he was 'saved' and that he now had to go and 'dig into the Word'. They did not hand out any spades, but apparently they meant that he had to start reading in the incomprehensible big



book. As there was no exit, he went back to the central hall. Some people left altogether, but he stayed as something had caught his attention and, strangely, he did feel a bit 'different'. So what next?

Another door in the central hall said 'The Word'. So long as he was not expected to dig ditches, it surely could not do any harm to find out what 'digging into the Word' meant.

This room was a bit smaller. The people inside were divided into groups. They all had the big book in some size or other. He decided to go round the groups. The first group was very pompous. The leader of the group spoke very loftily. Most of them were dressed in black, the women wore long skirts. The leader explained to him that this was the most fundamental group because they used the only correct version: the Authorised Version.

Unfortunately he could not understand any of it. He liked it alright, but it went so deep, he could not follow and, after a while, he moved on to the next group who explained that he had to 'memorise'. The members of this group learnt all kinds of bible texts by heart. Once they had mastered that, they would be completely 'in the Word'. He tried a few, but soon decided it was a pointless and exhausting exercise: surely you could find it all through the index? It seemed to him as if these people had 'dried up'.

The next group of people he tried were super-enthusiastic and inspired and they read the big book named The Book. In this group he learnt a lot, but eventually he found it too superficial. The leaders were unable to answer any difficult questions.

So he moved on to another group, which was very committed and a bit elitist. He understood that they only used part of 'the Word', for it needed to be contextualised: a lot was too culturally specific and should not be taken literally. Everything was a metaphor, maybe even God himself was a metaphor. He soon began to feel uncomfortable: it did not tally with his experience in the stadium. Time to move on again.

The following group was very serious and very quiet. They whispered to him in explanation that he needed to be completely quiet and that the Spirit of God would make everything clear during the reading. Full of enthusiasm he tried to read some - he concentrated until he saw stars before his eyes. That did not help, so what now? Surely he had learnt

everything he needed in these groups. He was convinced that 'the Word' was very important, and he hung on to the big book so he could read a bit every day, but he had had enough of all this, so he returned to the central hall. Others from the various groups also came away (although new ones joined). An occasional person left the building altogether.

Another door caught his attention: 'Prayer is the answer'. This room was divided by sound-proof screens between the various groups. One group was shouting and praying excessively noisily. They proudly told him that loud praying was real praying. Though it was quite interesting to watch, he did not last very long there. Another group was speaking strange words. They said that this was the highest form of prayer: 'in tongues'. Nobody explained anything and he could not understand it, so he moved on again. He was told that 'true prayer was in spirit and in truth', but in silence, please. They had candles, too. He stayed there for a while, because the meditating and the light were quite effective.

Then on to the next group. There was probably still more to be learnt about prayer. This group had a long list of regulations, because God always heard you and answered your prayer if you prayed in the correct manner. It sounded quite attractive so he tried it. Only it did not work, he received nothing. People were keen to help him: he should start with an hour on his knees in the mornings. Eventually he left - with sore knees and a feeling of guilt that he might not be praying correctly. Back to the central hall. Some others also had enough - some left the building altogether - others went on looking.

The next door said 'Only believe'. Helpful people led him to a chair. This gathering was unbelievably well organised and timed. He soon understood that, if you called out a few texts from the big book to the people and if everyone believed it in the correct manner, nothing would be impossible. That sounded really attractive. But it did not work and he was disappointed. When the speaker began to explain that your faith was at fault if it did not work for you, he decided it was time to go. Another thing that disturbed him was that there was much talk of money: the listeners needed to give, so that this hall of faith could be enlarged. With his hand on his wallet, he walked out. Others walked out with him, some of whom left the building altogether, but he did not want to leave. Even though the last room was a disappointment, this 'Kingdom of God' surely was better than being outside in the cold and the rain.



The next door bore the sign: 'social action'. On entering, the inspiration and commitment of the people struck him. The outside wall had many windows, through which people outside received food, helpful articles, soup. He was keen to get busy. He did think it strange that on a stage a group of people were constantly conferring and that a pile of administrative papers kept on growing. They turned out to be the management and committee members. He thought that a lot of time was wasted and what a shame it was that this room was not at the front of the building rather than at the back. After helping for a while, he returned to the central hall.

His attention was drawn to loud music coming from the next door which said, 'Praise & worship'. Unbelievable, such a big room, divided into a number of sub-rooms. One section had the most enormous organ. They told him proudly that this was God's sanctified instrument (and what went on in the other rooms was but child's play). This was great. He listened for a while, quite moved. Only it was difficult to sing: he was a child of his time. The next sub-room had an enormous sound and light installation: reli-rock. The band was top class. There must be people who really like that sort of thing! Quickly on to the next sub-room. What a relief! A large mass of people sang, danced, clapped and jumped enthusiastically to the cheerful rhythms. A praise band and a praise group led this very energetic singing. He happily joined in. He noticed that it was all about Jesus, Jesus and more Jesus. The partiality and the hype soon brought him to his senses. He enjoyed, but he'd better move on. In the next sub-room the men sat on one side and the women on the other. The unaccompanied singing was very serene, but not what he was looking for, so he moved on swiftly.

The next sub-room was lit by candles. A group of men in long dark clothes sang in a very strange manner. People whispered to him that this was the real music of faith. They were monks and they sang Gregorian chants. It was quite impressive but sent him to sleep. Back to the central hall.

All these teeming people, going from one room to the next. Through the main gate queues of people entered, and some left. Where was all this leading? He sat down on the edge of a beautiful fountain. It said, in beautiful letters: 'the source of eternal life'. As he was tired, he drank some of the water. Very refreshing!

What had he actually learnt? He had had an experience with God, he had definitely changed, he had learnt much. The various ways of doing things were sometimes funny, sometimes ludicrous, sometimes irritating. This location 'The Kingdom of God' was definitely a very special place, but was there more?

A door in a corner of the central hall caught his eye. He must have walked past it earlier. It was located in a niche that was barely visible. Where did that lead? It did not surprise him that no people came in and out of that door. When he reached the niche he noticed there were words above it. After wiping off the dust with his handkerchief he could read it: 'The OTHER part of God's Kingdom'. What would he find behind it? If the parts of the building he had already seen were so spectacular what might he find behind this door?

He opened the door, walked through and to his amazement he found himself outside in the square, where it was still chilly and raining. He turned around and saw a sign beside the entrance with the words: 'the WHOLE of creation waits for action from God's children.' "That's it!", he thought. Cheerfully whistling some praise and worship he put up his collar, and set off into the cold and wet to search out that other part of God's kingdom and to tell of what he had learnt, seen and experienced.'

Reading this story will bring a smile to our faces. Groups and customs are recognisable and can be put in perspective.

What remains is what Jesus said in answer to the question 'How to love God and your neighbour': DO as the good Samaritan.' Our life is unique. Our path and how God will walk it with each one of us is unique, too. What we do does not always prosper, there will be hills and valleys, but God is there with us!

Ps 23: *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."*



The truth is: nothing can separate me from the love of God.

### What now?

We need to keep breathing, relaxing, making an effort - both physically and spiritually. The latter we do by reading our bible, by prayer and by thinking hard about our life (word and deed). And then we need to put it all into practice.

## Questions & remarks:

## Epilogue

These 30 chapters are, in our opinion, the most important spiritual foundations to be able to go on tour, or are essential to approach a project.

*Some more valuable books to read* (all published by Continental Sound):

- Music & Ministry.** Biblical vision on music as a ministry
- Creative and christian.** Biblical principles for creativity and the arts
- Praise and worshippers.** An in depth study about form and function of praise and worship
- The Message.** What was the real message of Jesus. What does that mean for us today
- Behind the scenes.** How to organise all internal matters of a choir, group, band, ensemble
- Evangelistic concerts.** How to organise an event

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*'Then Jesus came to them and said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"'*

Mathew 28:18-20

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