

DISCIPLESHIP LESSON 32

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

2	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> EXODUS 11:1 – 14:31
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Take turns and **share (or read)** from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Exodus 11:1 – 14:31). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

3	MEMORISATION (20 minutes) <i>[THE GOSPEL]</i> (4) EPHESIANS 2:8-9
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A. MEDITATION

Read Ephesians 2:4-10. “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace that you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

(4)

Write the following memory verse on a white or black board as follows:

Salvation is a gift Ephesians 2:8-9.
For it is by grace that you have been saved, through <u>faith</u> - <u>and this</u> (faith) not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Write the Bible reference on the back of your card.

1. God’s love, mercy and grace.

What is the difference between *love*, *mercy* and *grace*? God is love (1 John 4:8), merciful (Luke 6:36) and gracious (Exodus 34:6). Because God is incomprehensible, his love for sinners will always be incomprehensible and unique (cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-8). God’s mercy and grace are aspects of his love. God’s mercy is God’s love for wretches that need pity, while God’s grace is God’s love for guilty and undeserving people that need forgiveness and salvation.

2. Salvation is by grace and not by works.

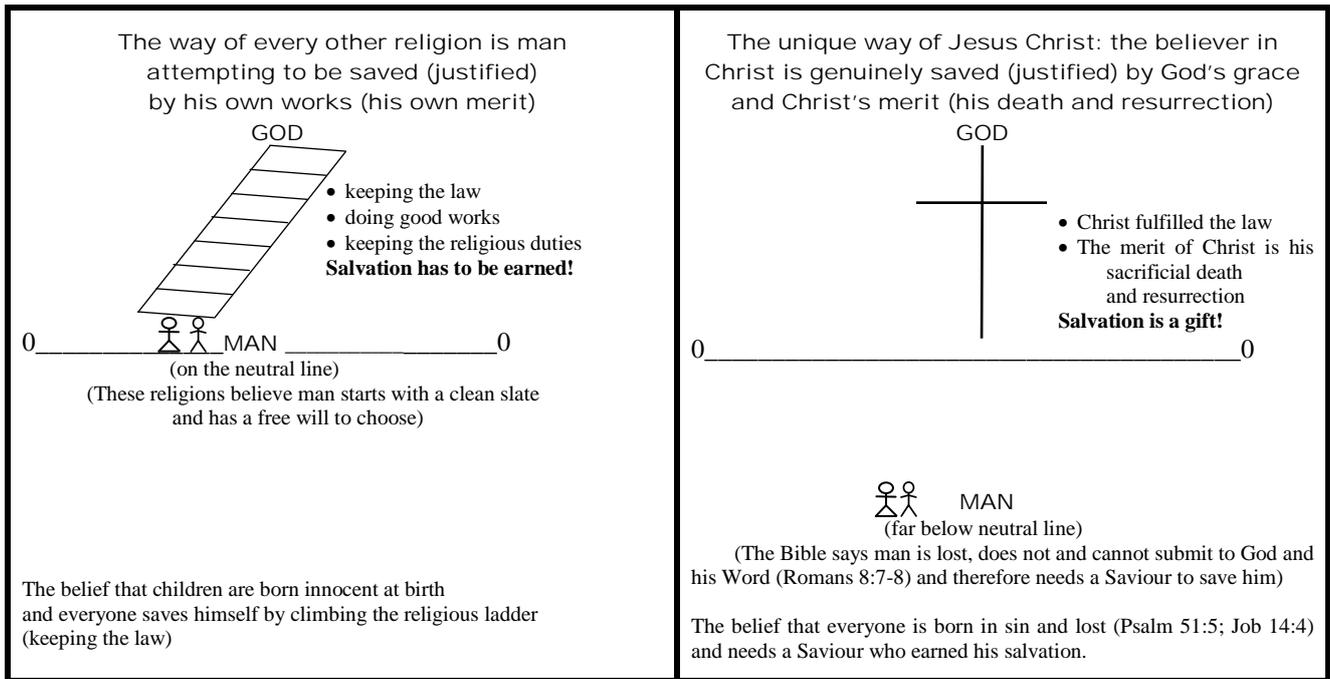
To be saved by grace is to be saved from sin without deserving it at all.

- God saves us from the guilt of sin by forgiving us completely (Hebrews 8:12)
- God saves us from the defilement of sin by cleansing us (1 John 1:9)
- God saves us from the power of sin by freeing us from certain addictions (enslavements) and by giving us a new nature that enables us to live the new life (Romans 6:6)
- God saves us from the punishment for sin by giving us eternal life (Isaiah 53:5-6).

To be saved by grace is the exact opposite of being saved by merit.

For example: by keeping the law

or by following the religious requirements as: praying, fasting, giving, compulsory wearing of religious clothing like a hat or headscarf and eating ritual clean food.



If people could be saved (justified) by their own merit (their own inherent goodness and strenuous effort), for example by keeping the law, doing good works or keeping the religious duties (like praying so many times a day, fasting so much, giving so much money and making pilgrimages), then they would not need God and God's work of salvation! Then they would not need the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus in their place! Then they would boast before God and say, "I saved myself!"

However, the Bible says very clearly that people are saved by God's grace and not by their own works or merit! God is the Author of salvation as well as the Giver of salvation. He works salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and he gives salvation as a free gift to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Salvation by grace means that salvation is *from the beginning to the end* a gift from God, which people do not deserve and which people cannot earn or buy. Salvation must be received (accepted) with empty hands! No one can earn or buy salvation or get it by winning a lottery!

3. Salvation is by faith.

All Christians believe that we are saved by the grace of God, through the atonement sacrifice of Jesus Christ and through their faith. However, Christians differ about how to look at "faith". Some Christians say that only grace is a gift of God and that faith is not a gift of God, but the work of man. Other Christians believe that grace as well as faith is a gift of God, but faith is also the responsibility of man.

(1) The view that faith is not a gift of God, but only the responsibility of man.

These Christians say that the words in Ephesians 2:8, "and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" do not refer to "faith" but only to "salvation by grace". Thus they say that "salvation" is the gracious gift of God and "faith" is not the gracious gift of God, but rather the duty or responsibility of man. "Faith" is thus a kind of "good work of man".

However, this view is not likely, because to say, "Salvation is by (God's) grace" and then to say, "This salvation is not of people, but the gift of God", would be an unnecessary repetition. Also in the original Greek the word "and this" (Greek: kai touto)¹ refers to its immediate antecedent (the preceding word): "faith" rather than to the more distant word: "grace".

(2) The view that faith is first the gift of God and thereafter the responsibility of man.

These Christians say that with regard to salvation, "grace is God's work, not a work of man" and "faith is God's gift, not something generated solely by man". They say that although the responsibility to believe and the activity to believe is man's responsibility (cf. Mark 1:15; Romans 1:16), nevertheless in Ephesians 2:8-9 the emphasis is on the fact that faith is both in its initiation and in its continuation entirely dependent on God. The apostle Paul was speaking of the "incomparable riches of God's grace" in verse 7. A proof of this grace is the fact that the believers in Ephesus were saved by grace, through faith. But then, lest the Ephesians should begin to think that they deserve credit, at least, for

¹ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich says that "kai touto" is a "kai explicative", which means a word is added with the purpose of explaining the previous word!

believing, Paul immediately adds that even this faith or the exercise of faith is not something generated by them, but is the gift of God! The salvation of man is from beginning to end entirely dependent on God (Philippians 1:6).

The responsibility to believe and the activity to believe belongs to man, but this is only possible after God gives to man faith as an undeserved gift.

- “Faith” is first given by God (Ephesians 2:7-8) to man and thereafter exercised by man (Romans 3:28)
- just as “love” is first given by God (Romans 5:5) and thereafter exercised by man (Mark 12:30-31)
- and just as “holiness” is first given by God (1 Corinthians 1:30) and thereafter exercised by man (Romans 6:13,19; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

The salvation of man is from beginning to end completely dependent on God. All the following Bible passages speak about “faith” as a gift from God!

- “The work of God is this: to believe in the One he has sent” (John 6:29).
- “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).
- “All who were appointed (by God) to eternal life believed” (Faith is thus a gift to the elect) (Acts 13:48).
- “The Lord opened her heart to respond (in faith) to Paul’s message” (enabling her to actually believe) (Acts 16:14).
- “He was a great help to those who by grace (of God) had believed” (Acts 18:27).
- “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29).
- “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” (Philippians 2:12-13).
- “To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours” (2 Peter 1:1).

“Faith” is only possible after hearing the gospel (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:17)! And hearing the gospel is only possible when God sends someone else to proclaim the gospel to you (Romans 10:14-17).

- “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through believe in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).
- “God has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10)!

4. The relationship between faith and works.

(1) We are not saved by doing good works (keeping the law) (Ephesians 2:9).

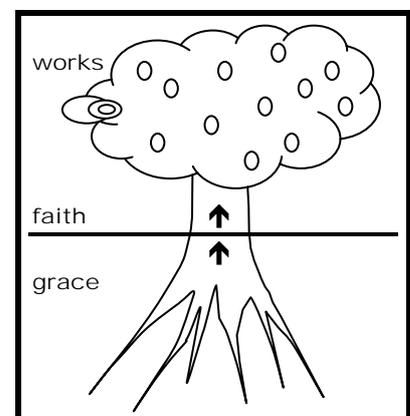
Living a moral and virtues life and keeping all the commandments will not justify any person on earth. “Because no one will be declared righteous in his (God’s) sight by observing the law” (Romans 3:20)! People are never justified in God’s eyes by doing good works or by doing religious works (as praying, fasting and going on pilgrimages), saved by doing religious works or good works, because it would rob God of his honour and glory for saving us by his grace and by his work through Jesus Christ on the cross. No man is saved by his own effort, but only by God’s eternal decision, which he worked out in time by letting someone else preach the gospel to us and by causing the Holy Spirit to work in us (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Every ground for boasting in ourselves is excluded!

(2) We are saved to do good works (Ephesians 2:10).

The purpose for our physical creation (being born) and spiritual regeneration (being born again) is to do good works. Before the creation of the world God planned that our existence on earth should have a very important purpose and be very meaningful (Ephesians 1:4). Our whole life should be filled with the good works, which God already prepared for us to walk in. Thus, even all the good works we do after we have come to faith are not our product, but the product of God’s preparation.

All good works are “from God, through God and to God”. God is the Author of good works, the Enabler of good works and the Goal of good works. Our life in the present, in its origin and in its future is dependent on God alone. To him be all the glory (Romans 11:36)!

Salvation can be illustrated with a flourishing and fruit-bearing tree. The *root of salvation* is God’s grace in which he gives us his Holy Spirit and faith.



The *fruit of salvation* are the good works, which he already prepared for us to walk in. Jesus Christ requires that we, who believe in him, should bear much fruit and lasting fruit (John 15:5,16)! Our Christian behaviour and actions work together with our Christian faith and make that faith complete (James 2:22).

B. MEMORISATION AND REVIEW

1. **Write.** Write the Bible verse on a blank card or on one page of your small notebook.
2. **Memorise.** Memorise the Bible verse in the right way. (4) Salvation is a gift. Ephesians 2:8-9.
3. **Review.** Divide into twos and check one another's last memorised Bible verse.

4	BIBLE STUDY (70 minutes)	<i>[THE CHURCH]</i> (4) THE GOALS OF THE CHURCH: EPHESIANS 4:1-16
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Make use of the five steps method of Bible study and study Ephesians 4:1-16 together.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD'S WORD
Read. LET US READ Ephesians 4:1-16 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
Consider. WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? Record. Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (The following are examples of people sharing what they have discovered. Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things, not necessarily these things)	

4:1-11

Discovery 1. The growth of the Church (every congregation) is dependent on unity and diversity.

The growth of the Church is dependent on the unity of the Church. This unity of the Church is again dependent on the kind of life every Christian individual is living. When all the Christians *live* lives worthy of their calling, that is, live lives that are characterised by humility and gentleness, by patience and love, then the Church will more easily be a unity and grow (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The growth of the Church is dependent on the diversity of the Church. This diversity is again dependent on the functioning of the diverse spiritual gifts of the individuals. When all the Christians *serve* the others with their spiritual gifts, the Church will more easily be a unity and grow. Every Christian will feel needed and will make the other Christians feel needed as well (Ephesians 4:7-11).

4:12-16

Discovery 2. The growth of the Church (every congregation) is dependent on the relationships, maturity and ministries of the Church.

Relationships based on truth and love (Ephesians 4:15) will make the Church grow. Mature Christians who have personal Christian convictions (Ephesians 4:13-14) will make the Church grow. And different kinds of Christian ministries (services) (Ephesians 4:12,16) will make the Church grow. The more Christian ministries (services) there are in the Church, the more different kinds of Christians will have an active function in the Church. Unity based on uniformity stifles Church growth, while unity based on diversity of gifts and ministries promotes Church growth.

STEP 3. QUESTION.	EXPLANATIONS
Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP? Let us try to understand all the truths in Ephesians 4:1-16 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand. Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook. Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.) Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.) (The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)	

(1) THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH IS TO BUILD UP
RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THE ONE ANOTHER RESPONSIBILITIES.

4:1-2

Question 1. To what kind of a life has God called Christians in the Church?

Notes. Ephesians 4:1 says, “Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” The life, which is worthy of God’s calling, is characterised by the following seven virtues: humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, love, unity and peace. For example.

(1) What is gentleness?

A Christian who is gentle or meek possesses an inner strength to rather suffer injury than to inflict it. A meek Christian is definitely not a weak or spineless person, who blows along with every breeze. Instead, he is submissive under provocation. He is not easily provoked to react negatively. He does not quickly regard things, which other people say or do, as personal attacks. He is slow to insist on his rights. As a matter of fact, he realises that his rights are actually privileges which God grants him by grace.

(2) What is peace?

A Christian has peace with God and with other people. Peace with God is the freedom from guilt. It is the conviction that the *past* sins are forgiven. Peace is the freedom from fear. It is the conviction that the *present* difficulties are overruled for good. Peace is the freedom from the feeling of abandonment. It is the conviction that the *future* cannot bring about separation from God. Peace with God brings a restless mind to rest, fills an empty heart with contentment and makes a broken life whole again. Peace with other people means the absence of feelings of guilt, fear or rejection with respect to them. Peace with other people means that strife has been replaced by harmonious relationships and destruction by edifying relationships.

(3) What are the one-another responsibilities?

All the members should build one another up by fulfilling the “one another responsibilities” to one another. That is genuine Christian fellowship. For example, love one another, carry one another’s burdens, encourage one another, teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, etc.

(2) THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH IS TO KEEP UNITY IN THE SPIRIT.

4:3

Question 2. How do Christians practically maintain the unity of the Spirit?

Notes. Above all by their relationship to the Head, Jesus Christ. Then by their faith in the essential Christian teachings, their service to one another and their growth in discipleship. Some suggestions for Christians to practically maintain the unity of the Spirit are the following:

- Regard yourself as “a member that belongs to the Body of Christ” (something the Bible teaches) rather than “a member of a particular denomination” (something human tradition promotes).
 - Let different congregations use the same confession (the Apostolic Confession) instead of their own traditional confessional statements.
 - Use the same prayer (the Lord’s Prayer).
 - Form “a consultation meeting” (not a decision making body) of Christian congregations in your town and try to fulfil the great commission together.
 - Organise a meeting of Christians in your neighbourhood at least once a year. Sing together. Share your discoveries from a well-chosen passage in the Bible with one another. Pray together and fellowship together.
 - Help a struggling congregation in your neighbourhood to survive instead of recruiting its members away.
 - Apply the following three principles:
 - (1) Unity in essentials (what the Bible reveals as absolutely essential)
 - (2) Acceptance in non-essentials
 - (3) Love in everything
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4:4-6

Question 3. Which unity must Christians maintain?

Notes. In Ephesians 4:1-6 the emphasis is on the unity of the Church. The unity of the Church is not external and *organisational*, but internal and *organic*. It is not superimposed by any kind of human organisation or church structure (e.g. denomination), but is the result of the indwelling Christ.

- According to the Bible, every individual congregation ought to be completely independent from any umbrella organisation (as a worldwide Council or a denominational council, synod or conference).
- But all individual congregations together are mutually dependent under the leadership of its Head, Jesus Christ (by means of his Word and his Spirit and its own council of elders).

And because the Church consisting of all individual congregations in the world is spiritually a unity in Jesus Christ, namely, the one Body of Christ, all Christians should “make every effort to keep that unity of the Holy Spirit!” The unity is demonstrated, not by *organisational unity* (as under a pope, archbishop, patriarch, council, synod, conference or church denomination), but by *spiritual unity*. Christians demonstrate the unity of the Church all over the world by worshipping the same God of the Bible. They have the same Saviour of their sins. They have the same Holy Spirit, who dwells in them. They have the same Christian faith, as recorded in the same Bible. They have the same love and the same hope.

(3) THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH IS TO MAINTAIN DIVERSITY WITHIN UNITY.

4:7

Question 4. Which diversity must a congregation maintain?

Notes. In Ephesians 4:7,11, the emphasis is on the diversity of the Church. This diversity is the result of the diversity of grace (verse 7) and the diversity of spiritual gifts (verse 11), which Jesus Christ himself gave to his Church in the world. And it is the result of the diversity of ministries and the diversity of workings or manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

There is a great diversity of gifts of the Spirit among the members of the Body of Christ. The lists of spiritual gifts in Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 are not intended to be complete or exhaustive. The diversity of grace and spiritual gifts promotes the unity of the Church, because every member uses God’s grace and his gifts to serve others and in turn needs the services of the other Christians. Christians receive grace and spiritual gifts in different kinds and in different measures, not for their own sake, but for serving other Christians, for equipping the Christians to do different kinds of ministries, for building up the world-wide Christian Church (including every individual local congregation) and for glorifying God.

We Christians should remember four important things concerning spiritual gifts.

- Christians must recognise a spiritual gift as a gift (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:7-8), not as the product of their own skill or ingenuity.
 - Christians must view their spiritual gift as only one among many spiritual gifts and as limited in extent: “a measured gift” (Ephesians 4:7).
 - Christians must recognize that some gifts are “functions” (services) like “teaching” (Romans 12:7) and other gifts are “offices” (appointed servants) like “teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).
 - Christians must be eager to use their spiritual gift not for their own glory, but for the benefit of the entire Church and to God’s glory (1 Peter 4:10-11).
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4:8-10

Question 5. What is the meaning of “the descent” and “the ascent” of Jesus Christ?

Notes.

The correct translation of Ephesians 4:8 is: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train (and) gave gifts to men.”²

(1) The text in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

The words in the Old Testament (Psalm 68:18-19) are not quoted, but applied in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:8). What the Psalm says about God in the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The Old Testament and the New Testament have been inspired by the same Spirit of Christ (1 Peter 1:10-12) and because the Old Testament is best explained in the New Testament (Colossians 2:17) and because the apostles of Jesus Christ received the complete revelation (John 16:13-15), the apostle Paul has the right to apply what is said about God in the Old Testament to Jesus Christ in the New Testament!

In the Old Testament God moved together with uncountable chariots (think of angels) from Mount Sinai (where the Law was given) to his sanctuary on Mount Zion (where the temple stood). He led captives (the prisoners of war from the conquered nations) along and received gifts (enforced taxes). He then returned triumphantly to his dwelling (the temple on Mount Zion). The ark, which symbolised the presence of God and was carried down to the battlefield and after victory was carried triumphantly up Mount Zion, was a clear “shadow” of the humiliation of Christ (his incarnation) and his exaltation (his ascension).

In the New Testament Jesus Christ descended from God’s dwelling in heaven down to “the lower parts of the earth”, that is, to the earth which is lower than the heaven. After his death and resurrection from the dead, he returned triumphantly to heaven. He gave gifts (grace and spiritual gifts) to Christians (Ephesians 4:7).

² A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament by Bauer, Arndt en Gingrich. NIV. “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men”.

His ascension into heaven is depicted as a triumphant procession of a general after his victory into Rome. Such a general led captives in a train behind his carriage and gave gifts to people. Also Jesus Christ leads “captives” in his train as he ascends into heaven.

- In 2 Corinthians 2:14 and in Ephesians 4:8 these “captives” are Christians whom Christ conquered through his love (mercy and grace) and completed work of salvation. He received these captives as “the booty” of his work of salvation. Christians now follow Christ in his triumphal procession that began with his ascension. Jesus Christ received these Christians in order to give them together with grace and spiritual gifts to his kingdom and the ministry of the kingdom on earth.
- In Colossians 2:15 these “captives” are the disarmed powers and authorities of the kingdom of the evil world.

The gifts. Jesus Christ received in order to give! He received these captives in order to give them to his kingdom to do kingdom-work on earth. In Ephesians 4:11 the “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers” are “spiritual gifts” which Jesus Christ gave to his Church (not necessarily to any particular denomination or local congregation) in order to equip Christians for works of service so that in this way the Body of Christ (the Church) may be built up. The gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 can be “functions” within ministries, but are rather “offices” (appointed servants).

The leadership in congregations. What is important is that these offices function under the leadership of the elders in every congregation, because the apostles of Jesus Christ had appointed the council of elders as the leadership in each congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1) and also because the apostles have never set themselves above the elders (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1). Some of the elders may have such a gracious spiritual gift. But these gracious spiritual gifts are not a requirement for becoming an elder. Ordinary members may also have such gracious spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11).

(2) The incarnation (the descent) and the ascension (the ascent) of Jesus Christ.

The descent of Jesus Christ to “the lower earthly regions” or better to “the regions lower than the earth” is contrasted with his ascent to “the place higher than all the heavens”³. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:9-10 and the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:18-22 are NOT referring to a descent of Jesus to the underworld of spirits or hell (in order to proclaim the gospel there), but rather to a descent of Jesus from heaven to a position lower than any human being on earth has ever gone. Although Jesus Christ was completely equal to God the Father, he emptied himself, that is he renounced this glorious position, but not his Divine Nature, took on the fallen human nature of man besides his divine nature, became the servant of all people, died as a criminal for the sins of people (Philippians 2:5-8) and was finally in his human nature forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46).

Therefore God exalted him to the highest position in the universe, so that one day all knees would bend before him and all tongues acknowledge that he truly is the Son of God, is the King of kings and Lord of lords (Isaiah 45:23; Ephesians 1:20-21; Philippians 2:9-11; cf. 1 Peter 3:22). No one except Jesus Christ ever descended from heaven to the position of taking the sins of the world and the punishment for the sins on himself and of suffering the agonies of hell (Matthew 27:46)⁴! No one except Jesus Christ ever ascended into heaven to a position of sitting on the right hand of God the Father in order to reveal and to execute God’s plan of salvation and judgement in the history of this world (Revelation 5:1-14)!

(3) The kingdom of God is its final phase.

The triumph of Jesus Christ will be complete when he” fills (completes, perfects) the whole universe (with his presence)(Ephesians 4:10). The Christian Church will be the fullness of him “who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:23; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1-3; cf. Romans 11:25-26). Christ will reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25). God “will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). His kingdom will finally fill the whole universe (Daniel 2:44)! And his kingdom will be eternal (2 Peter 1:11)!

(4) THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH IS TO EQUIP ALL CHRISTIANS TO SOME SERVICE.

4:11-12

Question 6. How does a congregation equip their Christians?

Notes.

(1) The spiritual gifts that equip.

A congregation equips Christians by means of those Christians who are able to equip other Christians. They are appointed by Christ and the elders to serve in the office of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers.”

³ Greek: εις τα κατωτερα [μερη] της γης + υπερνω παντων των ουρανων

⁴ Jesus Christ never descended into “hell”, the place “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). During his crucifixion he suffered the agony of “being forsaken by God” (Matthew 27:46; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9). 1 Peter 3:18-22 teaches that after his resurrection by the Spirit, Jesus Christ went somewhere (namely, he ascended into heaven)(verse 22) and proclaimed something (namely his complete triumph through his resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven) to the world of unbelievers (symbolised by “the spirits in prison, the disobedient” as in the days of Noah)(cf. Matthew 24:37-39). The teaching that during his death Jesus descended into the realm of the dead and preached the gospel to the dead in order to give them a second chance to repent, is a complete false teaching!

- The “apostles” are Christians sent out (as missionaries) to accomplish a special task, like planting new congregations (house churches).
- The “prophets” are Christians who preach or proclaim the messages of the Bible especially to Christians.
- The “evangelists” are Christians who proclaim the gospel especially to non-Christians.
- The “shepherds” are Christians who care for the flock of Christians.
- The “teachers” are Christians who teach the truth of the Bible to others.

The Christians who have received these spiritual gifts do not necessarily occupy a position or office and are not necessarily the leaders of the congregation. The leadership of every congregation is always “the council of elders” (1 Timothy 4:14). These spiritual gifts should always function under the authority and supervision of the council of elders in every congregation. Of course, some elders may receive some of the above-mentioned spiritual gifts and utilize them in service (1 Timothy 5:17).

(2) The goal of the spiritual gifts that equip.

The Christians who have received gifts of equipping should help other Christians to serve Christ (and not a particular leader) and to build up the Body of Christ (and not a particular denomination). Such Christians are equipped to serve in one of the many tasks or services within the local congregation or within the worldwide Body of Christ. For example, some Christians are equipped to do evangelism and others to make disciples of Christ. Some Christians are equipped to preach, teach, counsel, serve, give, care, etc. And other Christians are equipped to minister to children, to the youth, the old people, the foreigners or refugees. No member of any congregation should just passively attend his congregation. Every member should eventually function in the task, which Jesus Christ has assigned to him (Mark 13:34; 1 Corinthians 3:5-6).

The Christian Church is already the most influential group of people on earth! It is the greatest company in the world! However, if every Christian in the world today would do one work of service, then the Christian Church would become even much more influential on earth! Christians are already telling the people in every nation on earth about Jesus Christ. Christians are already involved in building up healthy families and societies everywhere in the world. Christians are making positive contributions to schools and hospitals and other parts of societies. Christians give the world good books and magazines to read, good music to sing and good TV programmes to watch. Every Christian should be God’s instrument in the establishment of his kingdom. The kingdom is the sovereign rule of Jesus Christ in the hearts and lives of people on earth (Colossians 1:13)!

When a congregation implements these goals, it will grow in spiritual quality as well as in numerical quantity! And that congregation would bring much glory to God!

(5) THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH IS TO DISCIPLE ALL CHRISTIANS TO MATURITY.

4:13-16

Question 7. How does a congregation help Christians to become disciples of Christ?

Notes.

Ephesians 4:13-14 says, “Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by the every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

(1) The goal of discipleship is a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Christian discipleship begins through knowing Jesus Christ personally. The emphasis is on “knowledge” in the subjective sense. A person can only grow into a disciple by knowing Jesus Christ personally as Saviour and Lord. And this knowing of Jesus Christ implies that we Christians maintain a continual personal and intimate fellowship with him (John 15:5-8).

(2) The goal of discipleship is a good grip (on the Christian Faith, that is, the teachings of the Bible).

Christian discipleship is based on a knowledge and practice of the Bible. The emphasis is on “faith” in the objective sense. A person continues to grow by having a good grip on the whole Bible⁵. The unity in the world-wide Church and in every individual congregation should be based on the teachings of the Bible (correctly interpreted). That constitutes “the Christian Faith”.

(3) The goal of discipleship is maturity.

Mature Christians should help other Christians to grow to maturity. We make new believers disciples of Christ by helping them to have a growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to obey Jesus Christ and to develop a Christian character and life-style. The measure of Christian maturity is Christ likeness.

⁵ Study www.deltacourse.org for discipleship based on the Old Testament, New Testament and Practical Christianity.

(4) The results of discipleship are stability, genuine relationships and edification of the church.

Ephesians 4:15-16 says, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.”

Some visible results of discipleship is that Christians stand firm in the Christian Faith, believe, speak and do the Christian truths and commit themselves to build one another and the Church up. Thus, the unity among Christians is based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, on holding on to the Christian Faith as taught in the Bible, on growing to Christian maturity and on building one another up.

Are these goals of the church in the Bible also the goals of your church?

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from Ephesians 4:1-16.

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record. Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application.

(Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from Ephesians 4:1-16.

- 4:1. Live your life worthy of the calling, which you received from Jesus Christ.
- 4:1. Learn to be gentle or meek. Be submissive under provocation. Do not be easily provoked to react negatively. Do not quickly take things, which other people say or do, as personal attacks. Do not insist on your rights.
- 4:3. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit within your local congregation and within the worldwide Christian Church.
- 4:4-6. Remember there is only one God (God over all, through all and in all), one Lord Jesus Christ (God who took on the human nature in human history) and one Holy Spirit (God who lives in the hearts and lives of believers) (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6). Remember there is only one holy Book (the Bible) that teaches the one faith (the Christian Faith), which God wants all people to have. Remember there is only one Church (Body) in the world. All individual congregations or house fellowships belong to that one Body as physical members belong to a physical body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).
- 4:7. Accept the fact that your spiritual gift is “a measured gift” – Jesus Christ measures it to you and it is limited in extent.
- 4:11-12. If you are a shepherd, teacher, evangelist, preacher or missionary, your main task is to equip the other believers so that they begin to take a part in the Body, have a ministry or service in the Body and help build up the Body. Traditional “pastors” or “priests” must stop trying to do everything in the congregation! The Head (Jesus Christ) of the Body also wants all the other members to function!
- 4:13-14. Your goal should be to grow and to be built up so that you may become mature! The standard of maturity is Christ likeness. Two areas of growth are very important: your personal knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ and your knowledge of the Christian faith in the Bible.
- 4:15-16. Your goal should be to personally grow to look more and more like Jesus Christ and to have a part in the growth of the worldwide Church.

2. Examples of personal applications from Ephesians 4:1-16.

From now on, I want to dedicate myself to disciple some new Christians to maturity in Christ. I want to help them to grow in their relationship with Christ, to develop Christian virtues and to obey the teachings of the Bible.

I want to continue to equip more and more Christians to do some work of service in the congregation and in the world-wide Church. I want to equip some to evangelise, others to disciple new Christians and again others to preach and teach, etc.

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in Ephesians 4:1-16.

(Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5

PRAYER (8 minutes)

[INTERCESSION]
PRAY FOR OTHERS

Continue to pray in groups of two’s or three’s. Pray for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples.
Preach, teach or study the Bible study of Ephesians 4:1-16 together with another person or group of people.
2. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of Exodus 16:1 – 19:25 each day.
Make use of the questions method of quiet time. Make notes.
3. Memorisation. (4) Salvation is a gift. Ephesians 2:8-9. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
4. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. Update your notebook on making disciples. Include the notes on your personal time with God, memorisation notes, Bible study notes and this preparation.