



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

the things we firmly believe

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Study 13: What Paul Teaches About The Church (TTWFB, 2:7-8; pp. 162-170)

Paul in the Church

The apostle Paul

- first known as Saul
- came from a city called Tarsus which was located in what is now modern-day Turkey (Acts 9:11)
- belonged to the religiously zealous group called the Pharisees; a ‘stand-out’ in his generation (Gal. 1:14, Php. 3:4-6)
- seems to have been present in Jerusalem during the very early days of the church (Acts 7:58, 8:1)
- his approval of the death of Stephen seems to indicate that he was aware of, and offended by, the new faith in Jesus as God’s Messiah. Probably he was aware of their doctrine and their practice. He saw this through biased eyes, but he did see it. (Gal. 1:13, Php. 3:6)
- Stephen’s death became a point for him to commence a more open opposition to this new sect (Acts 9:1-3). He was certainly well known among Christians for his opposition (9:13-14).
- His conversion to Christ on the road to Damascus was thorough and dynamic!
- He experiences fellowship with the Christians in Damascus (9:19ff) and then had to flee for his life.
- He finally arrived in Jerusalem, where the disciples were afraid of him due to his prior reputation, but Barnabas works hard to have him welcomed (9:26ff).

The church in Jerusalem at that time

- Judaism in Jerusalem had a more defined Jewishness than the Judaism of many who were scattered in the wider Greco-Roman world. Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews tended to have a tense relationship with each other
- These tensions extended (unfortunately) into the early church. In Acts 6 we see it raise its head in the question of the care of widows (6:1), and we see the wisdom of the Spirit given to handle this situation.
- In Acts 10 and 11 Gentiles are baptised, and the Jerusalem church is anxious to know why this has been done. The issue of circumcision as the sign of belonging to Israel remains important to the Hebraic Christians (11:2-3). Yet God’s action can’t be denied (11:4ff)
- Later in Acts 11:19ff the gospel leads to many in Antioch to believe in Christ. Barnabas is sent up from Jerusalem to authenticate what has been going on. He *saw* the grace of God (11:22-23)

The church in Antioch

- Acts 11:25-26—Barnabas seeks Paul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch.

- The church there was much more a hybrid of Jewish and Gentile background believers (see the names of the prophets and teachers there—13:1).
- From there Barnabas and Paul set out on their missionary journeys. Paul sees this church as his home base from then on.
- These missionary journeys were into the Gentile world.
- He preached first in the synagogues and then more widely if the synagogue would not have him.
- Those who received the gospel message were incorporated into the new community of God's people, the church.
- Paul appointed elders for the church and let it immediately develop its own life in the gospel and the Spirit.
- He wrote letters to the churches and, when possible and appropriate, revisited them to strengthen them in the gospel he had preached.

Paul's Teaching about the Church

While the church exists as 'churches', i.e. congregations, it is essentially *one* in Paul's thinking. Acts 9:31 speaks about the church (singular) throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Each church was a local realisation of the whole church. 'No church is an island entire unto itself' (apologies to Donne).

There is a structure for each church in its local expression. There are elders (or presbyters) and deacons who have leadership roles, and all members have gifts of the Spirit, ministries and service to perform in Christ, all of which are operations of the Father's working (1Cor. 12:4ff; Eph. 4:11-13).

Some of these gifts, which have been called 'ministry gifts', cannot be contained to the local setting only—it seems that the gifts of apostle, prophet, and evangelist at least were 'itinerant', spreading through all the congregations of Christ's church.

There seems to be an order to these gifts, an order of authority. (1Cor. 12:28—*first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, *then...*' All are certainly subject to the apostles, not in control terms but to the gospel the apostles proclaimed.

The church is 'the body of Christ.' Every believer is a member of that body; every member is interrelated and interdependent with each other. Each member is gifted so that by the use of the gift the whole body may be blessed and built up. It is for the *common good*. Even personal use of gifts is finally to make one stronger in serving others.

The unity of the church is essentially then a unity of serving love. The unity of love transcends all the outward signs of difference—gender, race, social status. The gifts are for the building of one another in this unity of love. 'The primary purpose of the gifts is love, and if the gifts are used for any other purpose then they are useless, sterile, and a contradiction in meaning.' (TTWFB, p. 168).

God's people are in spiritual conflict with powers of darkness that seek the destruction of the church. In Eph, 6:10-18 we are told of weapons we use in defeating these powers. Unity in this is very important (Php. 1:27-28). Vigilance against the world, the flesh and the devil is essential. This is matched by the urgent need to walk in the fullness of the Spirit.

The church's task is proclamation of the gospel. Through this work the enemies are being put down by Christ (1Cor. 15:24-28). The church's members are co-workers and co-sufferers with Christ.