



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

## the things we firmly believe

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### Study 14: Peter and John and the Church

(TTWFB, 2:9-10; pp. 171-179)

#### Peter and the Church

##### **Continuity and discontinuity between Israel and the church**

- The discontinuity seen in his calling believing Israelites to separate themselves from this crooked generation, which is in fact the unbelieving Jewish community which refused the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:40; 1Pet. 2:11-12). The ‘true Israel’ is those people who trust in Christ as redeemer from sins (1Pet. 1:1-2). Cf. Paul in Romans 4—Abraham and David (the key leaders of Israel) both knew that right at the heart of Israel’s life and faith was that God justifies wicked people not through their good works but through His own action in Christ. A true Israelite is one who believes this.
- The continuity is seen in that Peter talks about the church in images from Israel’s Old Testament heritage.
  - Amos 9:11-12 is used in Acts 15:12ff to show how the conversion of the Gentiles through the Gospel is part of the rebuilding of the house of David.
  - In 1Peter 4:17 he calls the church ‘the household of God’ and in 2:4ff he tells of how the church, in coming to Christ, are being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood offering sacrifices to God.
  - In 1Peter 2:9-10 he speaks of the church as being ‘a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God’—these are all Old Testament phrases for Israel which now apply to the church.
  - On top of all that Peter stresses that we call on one Father (1:17) and that we are one brotherhood (1:22, 3:8).

##### **The church is a suffering people.**

- The suffering is in the context of the finality and certainty of Christ’s saving work, which keeps us safe in the midst of it all (1Pet. 1:3-6).
- The suffering is an expression of the world’s rejection of Christ (1Pet. 2:11-12; 3:15b-16). We shouldn’t be surprised by it (1Pet. 4:12-14)
- Suffering for wrongdoing is not commendable before God; however unjust suffering is commendable before Him, and more is an honour from Him! (1Pet. 2:19-20; 3:13-15, 17; 4:15-16).
- Christ was the Suffering Servant and so we are not to expect any less. Like him then we are not to curse or revile in response (1Pet. 2:21-25; 3:9-12).
- Finally all suffering will be brought to an end (1Pet. 5:6-7, 10-11; 2Pet. 3:3ff)
- In the interim God’s people are on the move, suffering but not defeated and overcome or made ineffective, whilst they live in the fullness of the gospel (1Pet. 5:8-9, 2Pet. 1:3-11).
- Peter helps us see that the victory of God is not over, but in the midst of suffering.

## John and the Church

- John's Gospel is filled with different figures and teaching regarding the church: the vine and the branches; the flock and the shepherd; the family and the Father.
  - John 17 speaks very richly of the church as that which grows through the apostolic proclamation of the gospel, and which shares in the riches of the divine fellowship in the Godhead.
- John's first two letters do not mention the church explicitly, apart from the idea of the brotherhood (brethren)—and that idea is *very* strongly present. The church must be understood in familial terms, relationally connected rather than organisationally connected, working by love rather than by programmes or structures. The letters of John have a very high view of the working of love in the family.
  - The church is brought into being by the love of God in Jesus Christ, in his atoning death, making its impact on human hearts (1John 1:5-2:2; 3:1-3; 4:9-10, 19).
  - It is essential that the members love one another. The very essence and life of the church is obedience to the Father in love, which works as love to the brothers and sisters. This obedience is not a heavy imposition, because the heart has been captured by love. To love is to obey; true obedience is marked by love (1John 2:3-11; 2:15-17; 3:11-19; 4:7ff; 16b-21; 5:1-5; 2John 5-6;).
- The book of Revelation portrays the reality of the church in dynamic and powerful images.
  - In Revelation 2-3 the letters to the seven churches equate the churches with lampstands (bearers of the light of Christ in the world) among whom Christ himself walks, whom he holds in his hands, and who must live constantly by His word,
  - Rev. 6:9-11 speaks of a band of martyrs (=witnesses, testifiers) who have suffered even to death for their testimony
  - Rev. 7:1-8 speaks of the church as the complete people of Israel (144000, 12000 from each tribe)
  - Rev. 7:9ff speaks of the church as an uncountable multitude from the whole world, cleansed by the saving work of Christ, and worshipping God with joy and exaltation
  - In Rev. 11:1ff the image of the two witnesses seems to refer to the Old Testament and New Testament people of God in their testimony in the world concerning Christ. Here it is clear that the church lives constantly under the assault of the evil one, through an opposing world, who wants their destruction. This assault seems triumphant, but finally God vindicates his witnesses.
  - In chapter 12 we see how Satan can not attack Christ, due to his resurrection and ascension, but that his fury is now vented on the church, especially in accusation—i.e. the constant reminding of God's people of sins as though Christ had not done anything about them.
  - In chapter 13, the church is seen as those who refuse to follow the beast, and so who face opposition and hardship
  - In chapter 19 the church is portrayed as following the victorious Word of God (Christ himself); he carries the sword from His mouth, but as God's people speak their witness Christ's victory flows in the world.
  - Chapters 21 and 22 show the glorious destiny of the people of God.

## General Conclusions on the Church

‘Without doubt the apostles and others who followed Christ thought in terms of the church being the people of God and the true Israel.’

‘They dared... to see themselves—in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth—as the people planned and prophesied to do the will of God.’

‘They saw themselves as carrying through the [Old Testament] prophecies...’

... the people of God

... the family of God

... belonging to and proclaiming the Kingdom of God/the Father; this even in the face of severe opposition and hardship

Gentiles are included in the people of God as full participants without having to become culturally Jewish. Jews were not primary in this new community, but co-heirs with them, equal partners.

The oneness of the body is primarily the mystery of love in operation.

The church is God’s creation of a new humanity. It is not an amalgamated concoction of Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free, but a new humanity in Christ.

The church is called to be saints, sanctified as they through faith in Christ. They do not make themselves to be holy, for that was done in the body of Christ at the Cross. The new humanity was born by Christ taking the old humanity through the purging fires of the atonement, through the grave and into new life by his resurrection. This new humanity has been renewed and is being renewed, and will finally hear the great words which sum up all history, “I make all things new!”