



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

the things we firmly believe

led by andrew klynsmith and ben bleby

Study 12: The Church from Pentecost (*TTWFB, sect. 2; chh. 4-6; pp. 152-161*)

The Spirit at Pentecost and the Formation of the Church

1. The Spirit came according to prophecy—just as John had come according to promise, and Jesus too, so also the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff). These prophecies indicated that the last days, the days of God’s saving work had begun (Acts 2:21). These prophecies also showed that a people would be gathered through the Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom of God.
2. With the coming of the Spirit, the apostles were led into all the truth; all things that Christ had taught were brought to their remembrance and formed into a brilliant whole in their minds (John 16:12-15). On the day of Pentecost, the ‘apostles’ doctrine’ was formed in one brilliant act of revelation of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:42).
3. The Spirit gave such power in the proclamation of the message that 3000+ believed, repented, had their sins forgiven and themselves received the gift of the Holy Spirit. This large group of people had to belong somewhere. They had belonged to the body of Israel. Now they were the body under their head, the Lord Jesus. Pentecost at once spells out the ambiguous relationship between the church and Israel. There was *continuity* because all Israel should have believed in the Messiah Jesus; there was *discontinuity* because in fact not all did and so believers were called to ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation’—i.e. don’t ally yourselves with those who reject Messiah. Initially the believers worshipped at temple and synagogue, but eventually the rejection of Messiah would mean a break between the two. (Note how in 4:23 Peter and John, after being released by the Sanhedrin ‘went back to their own people’.)
4. The word ‘church’ (Gk: *ekklesia*) is not used in Acts until chapter 5, and even then it may not have been a word used at the time for the gathered believers, but a word from later that Luke uses. Other terms for them are used: ‘all who believed’ (2:44; 4:32), ‘the company of those who believed’, ‘the number of the disciples’, and ‘the brethren’. Often it is simply said that they ‘gathered together’ (2:1,46). The *action* of what was happening in and among them was more important than their structures or institutional arrangements.
5. What the church was primarily on about was proclaiming Jesus as Lord. Acts 4:24ff, after Peter and John had been persecuted by the Sanhedrin and forbidden to preach, shows all who believe gathering to pray together, and with great power, so that the word is preached with tremendous effects. ‘They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly’ (4:31).
6. The community or fellowship that came into being through the message of the gospel saw love blossom immediately. There was deep fellowship and sharing together, not only of heart and mind (though including that) but also of provision of needs. No one among them had any need (4:34)! There was care for widows (women with no family support, in an age where there was no government support either.)

7. All this grew organically from the gospel, and not by demand of the apostles. It was not organised or strategised into being (although some organization for its best operation was needed when it was happening.)

‘It has arisen out of the message of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. It is the body which has sprung from the Word and the Spirit into its being as an entity. In it, the Spirit and the Word work, and through it the Spirit and the Word go on working. It is clear, now, why Christ did not have to speak much about it, especially in the term “church”, and why he did not to define its form... It needed only the revelation by the Spirit at Pentecost, and the gifts which the Spirit brought, *especially the gift of apostleship*, to bring the church into true being.’ (TTWFB, p. 155).

The Gift of Apostleship

Apostles were a new gift, unknown in the Old Testament, given uniquely to the church.

Apostles were, literally, ‘ones who were sent’. They had:

- been called by Jesus and accompanied him in his ministry;
- witnessed his death and resurrection; and
- been commissioned to make disciples of the nations

These eleven (after the death of Judas), and then Twelve (with the selection of Matthias), and then Thirteen (with the ‘untimely’ selection of Paul) were given by the Spirit revelation of just how all the events of Jesus’ ministry fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and anticipations. They were to:

‘...tell of the events of Christ in the light of the Old Testament, and the teaching of the Old Testament in the light of the events of Christ.’ (TTWFB, p. 157)

This they did in the power of the Holy Spirit. Once this Spirit-led interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the events of Jesus’s life, death, resurrection and ascension had been formulated, an indispensable gift had been given to the believers throughout the ages. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20), and must never lose this precious gift of the setting out of the truth and significance of Jesus Christ.

The Separation of Church and Israel

Where the gospel is rejected, the people gathered and saved by that gospel are rejected. Where the gospel is rejected, the works attending the gospel are rejected. In John 11, after Lazarus was raised from the dead, the Sanhedrin—far from rejoicing in this mighty act of God—were deeply troubled. When the same power of God was present with the apostles and in the believers in Christ, again the Sanhedrin were disturbed, forbidding preaching in Jesus’ name. Persecution started to rise, and this cut the links between the infant church and her old moorings in Israel. When the gospel started to spread to Gentiles the separation was made final.

This persecution was one means by which the church started to move out to the world with the gospel. Perhaps they had started to get too cosy in their rich situation of love and blessing in Jerusalem? First Samaria (Acts 8) is reached. The persecution intensified, but this leads to one of its strongest supporters being met by Christ and soundly converted and called to take the gospel to the nations. The whole of Acts 1:8 is in the process of being worked through. The church existed not for itself and its life but to preach the gospel far and wide and to the ends of the earth, to announce Jesus is Lord! Still this continues; when it does not, we deny our essential nature as God’s people.