



new creation teaching ministry: tuesday night studies 2009

## the things we firmly believe

led by andrew klynsmith and ben bleby

### **Study 16: The Church In Service, Love and Proclamation** (*TTWFB, 2:13-15; pp. 192-204*)

The four elements of service, love, holiness and proclamation belong together in the ministry of God's people in the world. We cannot separate out any one of these elements as our 'favourite' or 'focus', but all must exist together within a congregation of God's people in a true balance given by the Holy Spirit.

#### **Service**

The word for service in Greek is *diakonia* and the word for being a servant or slave is *douleuo*. It is impossible to serve without being in the position of the servant. Service is not a power play, but a genuine, free and necessary giving for the benefit of others. In the New Testament it is clear that it was not just some in the church who were to take this role, but each Christian and all Christians together are *deacons*.

In 1Cor. 12:4-7 we read that there are varieties of gifts given by the Spirit, and services from the Lord (Jesus), and works empowered by the Father. The service of God's people requires life in the Triune God as the gifts, services and works all arise in the action of God. We have our life in God through the gospel. Where the gospel is not burning strong in the heart, service dries up quickly.

Service is an expression of love; in fact—Gal. 5:13-14; James 2:15-16; 1John 3:17-18—there can be no love where it does not actually express itself in serving another person—i.e. putting their needs ahead of your own. So also—1Cor. 13:3—there can be no true service without love—i.e. that deep concern for their good that flows out of the love of God.

Service has a double focus—the church and the world. Gal. 6:10; 1Thess. 3:12 both speak of this double focus (NB 'all men' cf. 'those who are of the household of God' and 'one another'). Perhaps the church under persecution requires special attention from family members over against those outside the family. The 'all men' is not negated by this; we must give attention to our service internally and externally.

Service in the world requires some careful thought. Care for those in need is not a matter for Christians only; by creation all people have responsibility for all people. There is place for a prophetic call for humanity to come to true humanity, but this must be matched by a readiness to proclaim the gospel which alone restores us. Christians are (or should be) sensitised to the material needs of others, and where possible are to give what help they can. The focus of the New Testament is in terms of the deepest needs of men and women, the ones called spiritual or moral, the need of redemption. These needs are no less real than what are called material and physical needs. The liberation of the gospel is the richest liberation a person can know. Service to material needs should never be used as a means to getting a hearing for the gospel; that is manipulation and not love.

## **Love and Holiness**

From the outpouring of the Holy Spirit onwards the church was a community of people who loved God and one another (e.g. Acts 2:42-47). This love was expressed in very practical service. It was not a prescribed or demanded love, but the spontaneous overflow of the dynamics of forgiveness. In one sense this is the purpose of conversion, because at the end of all things, what there will be will be love, faith and hope, the greatest being love (1Cor. 13:13) because God will be all in all and God is love.

Love works its way in every relationship: husband and wife, child and parent, worker and boss. The church is to do good to all. Love involves patience, forgiveness, kindness, forbearance, not keeping records of wrongs, not being easily angered, not being self-seeking. Love always seeks to protect and upbuild, always seeks to trust and to think the best of the other, and always pushes ahead and does not write a person off.

The love of God's people is holy love. We walk in love and we walk in light. We are to be holy because God who has called us to Himself in Christ is holy (1Pet. 1:13-21). This holiness is also to penetrate every part of our lives and all our relationships.

Ephesians 4:17—5:20 is bounded by a section urging us to no longer live in darkness, from which we have been rescued by Christ (4:17-19) and a section urging us now to live in the light(5:8ff). Between these two 'bookends' are some very important matters of practical holiness in life:

- Honesty in our dealings (Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes!', 'No', 'No!' and avoid all the 'Maybe's...')
- The refusing of anger in our relationships, and instead forgiveness and kindness
- Wholesomeness in our speech with one another, for building each other up
- Not even a hint of sexual immorality, either in our relationships or in our joking

These are all very pertinent issues today. Christians are under pressure in all these areas from the surrounding culture. We have for our strengthening and perseverance all the aid of forgiveness and cleansing through the Holy Spirit.

## **Proclamation and Witness**

The matters above are integral parts of our witness as God's people in the world. But the community as a whole is also the proclaiming community, through its witness and through its gifted and appointed proclaimers.

In the Old Testament Israel was a witness nation, but not a proclaiming one. Its witness was through the holiness of God's law lived out by them. When the church is born a new element of proclamation to the nations is given, but this element is foreshadowed in the Old Testament. The church is the proclaiming community. 'It proclaims the Gospel by actual utterance, whilst it is at the same time the true witnessing community.'

The witness and proclamation, the love and light of the community immediately brought them into conflict with the world. (Love arouses antipathy, not sympathy first of all!—John 15:17-18.) The conflict is not with human powers alone, but behind them stand evil powers seeking the destruction of God and His kingdom. Already Christ is victor over these powers through his cross and resurrection. The church lives in the victory of Christ. We face opposition from these defeated powers and are called to engage in warfare with them. This warfare involves personal victory over evil and impurity through the resisting of sin, but more it also involves the liberation of those under darkness' power. This is primarily through proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord. It may be attested by signs of power, miracles and wonders which are tokens of the rule of Christ.