

## The Christian Community In John's Writings

### Introduction:

1. This study continues our study about the church. Up to this point we have focused our attention on the church in the synoptic gospels.
2. In this lesson consideration will be given to the Gospel of John and the Epistles of 1, 2, 3 John.
3. In future studies we will focus on the church as revealed in Acts, the writings of Paul, Hebrews, James, 1, 2 Peter, and Revelation.
4. What does the Gospel of John and John's epistles communicate about the church?

### Discussion:

- I. The word "ekklesia" does not occur in the Gospel of John. It does occur in 3 Jn. 1:6, 9, 10. We will give attention to this text later. The church is not a foreign concept to John, but like the synoptics the kingdom is predominate.
  - A. The concept is first introduced in John 1:49 in the calling of the apostles. Nathanael confesses Jesus saying, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."
    1. This is a very powerful statement. It is equivalent to Peter's confession in Matt. 16:16.
    2. In our study in the synoptics we made confession of Jesus as the Son of God as equivalent to confessing Him as King. Here in this text it is made explicit. Nathanael associates "Son of God," with "King of Israel."
    3. Confession of Jesus as the Son of God is the same as confessing Him as King of Israel and carries with it the implication of submission to Him, i.e., making Him the King in one's own life.
    4. Both Nathanael and John, by his recording of this confession, agree in this.
  - B. In John 3:3, 5 John records Jesus telling Nicodemus that one must be born again in order to see or enter the kingdom of God. (Note that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19) are equivalent.)
    1. This is an important passage because it requires spiritual regeneration (a new birth) as a condition of entry into the kingdom. This is certainly consistent with what John the Baptist was preaching as he called for "repentance" and "bringing forth fruits" in preparation for the coming of the King.
    2. Jn. 3 identifies a birth of water and the spirit as a prerequisite to entrance into the kingdom.
      - a. Some say this is not a reference to water baptism. However, water baptism certainly seems to fit with the preaching and baptizing of John as he preaches baptism and repentance in anticipation of the coming King. It also fits with the instruction of the great commission and with the fact that those in the Book of Acts were told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins in execution of the great commission AND the fact that all those cases of conversion exemplified in Acts involve baptism provides evidence that cannot

be overlooked. The evidence associates water baptism with the time of spiritual regeneration and a new birth.

- b. This does not mean, however, that it is the act of getting wet that gives the new life. Col. 2:12-13; Titus 3:5 indicate that it is God (the Spirit) who raises the dead from the grave of baptism.
- C. John 12:12ff presents Jesus as the King of Israel.
  1. John identifies Him as the fulfillment of Kingdom prophecies (v. 13, Psa. 118:26, v. 15, Zech. 9:9-10).
  2. Jn. 12:32 refers to Jesus being lifted up and drawing all men to himself.
    - a. This implies the emergence of a community as a result of His being lifted up and men being drawn to Him.
    - b. It connects the King's death to the establishment of the community.
- D. Other passages are also suggestive of the establishment of community.
  1. John 11:51-52 refers to Jesus' death as gathering Jews and Gentiles "together into one the children of God." This implies a community.
  2. The oneness of John 17:22 also supports the idea of a prospective community.
  3. The shepherd imagery of John 10:16 and the references to "this fold" (Jews) and "other sheep" (Gentiles) together constitute one flock, or one community.
  4. The vine imagery also suggests community (Jn. 15:1-11).
  5. And eating His flesh and drinking His blood in the Lord's Supper (Jn. 6:54-58) identifies a community that not only memorializes Him in the Supper, but participates in the life giving power of His flesh and blood as the critical action of the community.
- E. So, while the word "church" is not used in the Gospel of John the idea of a community is clearly evident.

## II. A survey of the Epistles of 1, 2, 3 John and the church.

- A. There is no reference to the nature or government of the church in 1 John.
  1. Paul refers to Christ as head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). He also refers to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors/teachers (Eph. 4:11).
  2. In Philippians Paul addresses overseers and deacons in his salutation (1:1).
  3. 1 John makes no such references.
  4. However, 1 John uses pronouns like "we" and "us" and speaks of our fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:6-7). This definitely implies a community.
  5. In 1 Jn. 2:19 he references those who have gone out from us. This must mean that there was some kind of community from which these individuals had withdrawn.
- B. 2 John is addressed to "the chosen lady."
  1. If this is a congregation, the epistle provides information regarding the approach a church is to take toward deceivers.
  2. If the chosen lady is an individual, she and her household are not to accept those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ.
  3. In both 1 and 2 John maintaining purity of teaching is important. As seen through the window of the Kingdom, the instruction of the King is to be followed without deviation.

- C. 3 John specifically mentions the church.
  - 1. Verse 6 mentions those who bear witness to the love of others before the church.
  - 2. Verse 10 identifies Diotrophes as one who puts brethren “out of the church.”
  - 3. Obviously there is a community from which brethren can be cast out.

Conclusion:

- 1. What do the Gospel of John and the Epistles contribute to our understanding of the church?
- 2. They dovetail well with the teaching of the Synoptics.
  - a. Jesus is the recognized King. Recognizing Him as the Son of God is the same as recognizing Him as the promised King.
  - b. There is definitely a community inherent in John’s thinking.
  - c. This community consists of those who recognize Jesus as King and have been born again by water and the spirit into this Kingdom.
  - d. There is an inclusive fellowship (both Jews and Gentiles) that are cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus God’s Son.
  - e. Those in this fellowship know Him and keep His commandments. It is necessary to abide in the teaching, support truth teachers and not aid those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ.
  - f. Love is the abiding principle.
- 3. For John, recognizing Jesus as the King, and being born into the kingdom is critical, then continuing to walk in the commandments.