

## **God's Community: A People Belonging to God**

### **By Bob Young**

One thing we often miss is the continuity between the OT people of God and the NT church. Example: Light in the OT—light in the NT. How can we become the vibrant fellowship of believers our Lord intends? Such demands a clear understanding of identity, instructions, purpose.

What is a biblical view of God's community? Who are these people who belong to God, the church?

Two NT passages: 1 Pet 2:9; Tit. 2:14. Here is a wonderful OT concept, "treasured possession," and the Septuagint uses the Tit. 2:14 word to translate a Hebrew concept.

OT: *cegullah* (seg-ool-law'); feminine passive participle of an unused root meaning to shut up; wealth (as closely shut up); KJV - jewel, peculiar (treasure), proper, good, special

Ex 19:5, because of the covenant, and we must keep it

Deut 7:6, because of the love and promise of God

14:2, because of the choice of God

26:18, because of the blessing of God

Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17; Eccl 2:8

NT: Tit 2:14, define, understand; *periousios* (per-ee-oo'-see-os; being beyond usual, i.e. special (one's own)).

NT: 1 Pet 2:9—chosen generation, royal priesthood, holy nation

**We are a purchased, possessed, peculiar people**

This is the idea of God's special, treasured, prized possession, his NT community which belongs to him.

I. A purchased people

II. A possessed people

III. A peculiar people, uniquely related, consider the purpose, we are an eternal people

These concepts give us our identity as the people, community of God. There are two aspects of identity: Who we are, what we do. For Christians, these are functions of the fact that we belong to God.

The church's identity as the community of God—

**I. PURCHASED.** We belong to God because he bought us. "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity."

Do you know how important you are to God? He purchased you. Consider the price he was willing to pay. Illus: someone who wants something so badly that he will pay any price to obtain it. This is how God sees us. I will pay any price to have human beings as mine, in voluntary relationship, created and recreated. Illus: ring for Jan but I could not afford it; anointing Jesus' body for burial. Parable: pearl of great price. Illus: redeemed, boy lost home-made boat, then bought it from store where he rediscovered it. God sees us as a real prize. 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

Thus the church is divine in its plan and origin, not human. The church is not a club to join. It is not a human organization. We are a special people, a treasured people. We are a relational people. We exist in relationship to God and in relationship to one another, his family named for him, but brothers and sisters.

Ecclesia, called out of the world to go into the world, called for a purpose

God's nation, Christ's body, the Spirit's temple

**II. POSSESSED.** We belong to God because he claims us. "And purify unto himself a peculiar people."

Illus: sometimes people own something but will not claim it. They are ashamed of it. God could be ashamed of us. Could say, I want nothing to do with them, as Moses in Exodus 34.

We are indwelt by God as his unique treasured possession. He possesses us, lives in us/through us.

We are not familiar with the language of possession in the Bible. What do you possess? what possesses you? In Mark, people are possessed by demons. In the OT, people can possess the land, they can also possess false gods.

God claims us, owns us. This is a major aspect of our identity as people belonging to God. God's ownership is seen in that we are indwelt by his spirit. We are indwelt, possessed.

The church is not an end in itself, not a cozy clique or a holy huddle. We do not own the church. We must not claim the church. It is not ours. It is bigger than we are. It goes beyond the walls of this building. We must know God's claim supersedes our own. The church is never about my preferences. The church is to advance the kingdom or reign of God, possessed people helping others learn how to be similarly possessed for eternal salvation.

**III. PECULIAR, PURPOSED.** We belong to God because he directs us. "Zealous of good works."

God claims us, owns us, therefore instructs us, he guides us. His presence among us provides a model for our own lives. God's ownership is seen in that we are obedient. "No one ever possesses a cat."

We are called to God's unique purposes. The church is of God's ownership and none other. Ecclesia—use in Plato, describing the trial of Socrates.

All of these things are true in the life of the church—God has acted to buy us, claim us, and he seeks to direct us in his ways. We are a purchased, possessed, peculiar people for him.

But what is true in principle is not fully true in fact. Only at his appearing will it become obvious that what is God's prerogative by right will be universally true in fact.

Kingdom may be described thusly: God's action in the history of the world. God's reign and rule has been at times visible, at times less visible, but always present. God is the one in control of this world. What is the relationship between God's rule and reign in the world, God's work in the world, and the church.

Augustine linked the divine kingdom and the church, so that theologians in the Middle Ages identified them as the same, identical. The Reformers in Europe continued the thinking. The early thinkers in the Restoration Movement pretty much adopted the same position and one can read it in many materials today. But we know it can't be exactly right because the kingdom is bigger than the church, including OT personalities.

As a reaction against the thinking that identified the church and the kingdom, a little over 100 years ago, certain men proposed classic dispensationalism, with a rigid distinction between the church and the kingdom. They made the kingdom entirely future, marked by the clear reign of the Messiah over/on the earth, for 1000 years. They ignored the presence of God's work in the world through the OT, the presence of the kingdom of God among OT Israel. They identified God's work among Israel as yet future, entirely future, and devised an incredible parenthesis to explain how God's work in the world has been suspended.

The biblical message will not let us follow either of these propositions. We must not equate the church and the kingdom, nor can we drive a radical wedge between them that completely separates them. We must understand the church in the context of God's work. God's kingdom is bigger than the church. Not only does kingdom include OT personalities, it also includes the heavenly court.

God's saving action in history, especially seen in Christ whom God sent to do his will, to bring his goals and purposes to pass, has been continued since Pentecost by the presence of the HS, and when people respond in faith and penitent obedience, they become participants in the church, which is the company of those who acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The church is the evidence of God's work in the world.

The church is the product of God's work in the world.

The church is the declaration of God's work in the world.

The church derives its identity from God's activity in the world.

We are called into being as God's community of faith by his purchase. This is grace. This is his unconditional action. This is salvation initiated by God. This is the foundation of salvation, this is the primary cause.

We are shaped as his community by his claim of ownership, by his constant possession of his people—by his providence, his provision, by his presence, his forgiveness. He claims us even when we remain undeserving.

This is also evidence of his grace, and despite our faith, we do not become thereby deserving, for we continue in our disgraceful humanity, graced only by his power and presence which are marks of his possession.

We are enabled as his peculiar people to advance his purposes in the world--to proclaim the gospel and live in the world as those who acknowledge the current and coming reign of God.

Our identity as the community of God demands that we accept his purpose as our own.

Purchased—celebrate and glorify his goodness, his power

Possessed—worship him and edify one another, his presence

Purified to be peculiarly his—make his purpose your purpose. He gives us purpose, he gives our marching orders. Let us go forth clearly guided by this truth: we belong to God.