
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

On March 11, 1830 a young girl named Victoria began her daily lessons with her tutor. Her lesson was the succession to the royal throne of England; as she studied the charts before her she discovered for the first time that she was the next heir to the throne! Victoria's first response was to weep. However, she then promised, "I will be good." Several years later Victoria inherited the throne and lived up to her promise because she knew who she was and acted accordingly.

One of the most powerful truths revealed about who we are as Christians is that we are the body of Christ! Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us that,

the church ... is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (NKJV).

But now what exactly does this mean? How does knowing that we are the body of Christ affect our behavior? Five important words help to give us the answer. These words are: vitality, unity, diversity, maturity and ministry. With each of these words there is a privilege and a responsibility. Let's look at these key words.

1. Vitality: Our union with Jesus Christ is a living union. I Corinthians says that,

... he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him (1 Cor. 6:17).

A Christian is not simply someone who tries to imitate Christ, we are one spirit with him! We can

become more and more like him in faithfulness, kindness and love because we have his life within us. I Corinthians 12:12-13 says that every believer helps to make up the body of Christ and that we have been incorporated into this body "by [in] one Spirit." The same Spirit of God that dwells in Christ dwells in each and every one of us. We all share the same empowering presence of God! What a privilege this is! Our responsibility now is to walk in fellowship with the Lord so that we can manifest this life that is within us.

2. Unity: Ephesians 4:4 tells us, "There is one body." There are many members of the one body of which Jesus Christ is the head. We may all live in different places and serve the Lord in different ways but we all belong to Christ and to one another through a spiritual unity created by God. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians exhorts us to endeavor,

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Paul then lists seven bonds that unite us:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

There is one body - the church; one Spirit - the gift of holy Spirit; one hope - the return of Jesus Christ; one Lord - the Lord Jesus Christ; one faith - the fundamental doctrines taught by the apostles; one baptism - the baptism in the Spirit; and, one God - the Father of us all. Our responsibility is to endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the

bond of peace. Our different "church bodies" may have minor differences, but we should build on our common beliefs to show a united witness of love and purpose in Christ (John 13:34-35; Acts 1:8).

3. **Diversity:** Though we are one body in Christ this does not mean that we are all the same. God is not interested in churning out little "cookie cutter" Christians. In Romans 12:4-8 Paul tells us that just as we have many different parts to our own physical bodies, "so we being many, are one body in Christ." And just as each part of our physical body has its own function to perform for our overall well being, so each and every believer has a special role to fill for the benefit of the whole church. Each and every one of us has been gifted by God for service to the church and we should all get busy sharing this gift with one another for the good of the church and the glory of God. Each of us is important and essential (I Cor. 12:14-27). Not a one of us should feel like a "second class" Christian because we are unlike one another in our gifts and ministry. Rather we should be proud of how God's grace is uniquely manifested through us for the good of the whole church.

4. **Maturity:** God's goal for us as believers is that we all mature into a "perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). In other words, God desires for us to all become more and more like Christ in all our knowledge, attitudes and actions. Leaders are to share the Word of God in order to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12). Then as "each part" of the body of Christ "does its share" the church is built up and matures in love (Eph. 4:16). Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us that we should "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together," but, instead, we should strive to help each other to be our best. The privilege in being "one body" is that we can *all* grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. Our responsibility is to help one another to grow up in him.

5. **Ministry:** When Jesus Christ came to Israel the scriptures state that he,

did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).

Since Jesus Christ is now in heaven until his future return, it is up to his spiritual body, his church, to serve. The church is primarily and fundamentally a

body designed to express the very life of the indwelling Christ through each uniquely and fully equipped believer. You and I were saved not just to "get", but to give! God almighty saved you to be a conduit of His blessings - not a cul-de-sac! Christ's ministry needs to be seen in the world today through you! I Peter 4:10-11 declares:

As each of us has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Each of us has received a gift from God and we are to minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God - all to the glory of God. As the body of Christ it is our responsibility to serve fellow believers in the church and then also to minister to a needy world.

What a privilege it is to be a part of the body of Christ! And what an awesome responsibility we have. Like Victoria we should weep at the grace and mercy of God bestowed upon us. And like her too we should promise to be good, not because we will inherit an earthly throne, but because we will inherit the kingdom of God.

During the time of his earthly ministry in Israel Jesus Christ could only minister in one place at one time. Today he lives in the lives of his people and through us he can touch the lives of countless men and women. May we, the church, rise up to the truth of who we are as the body of Christ so that we can be a greater witness for Christ and bring greater glory to God, our heavenly Father.

Chuck LaMattina

The Christ-Like Life of the Believer

by Richie Temple
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When a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord he is born of God's Spirit and spiritually becomes a new creation in Christ. As a child in God's family and a member of the church of the body of Christ it is the joy, privilege and responsibility of this believer to live a Christ-like life of love and service towards others. In doing this, the Christian believer is able to live in intimate fellowship with God as his Father, strengthen his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and bring the good news of salvation by grace to others in the world. The Book of Ephesians explains the proper relationship of God's gift of salvation to the believer's corresponding responsibility of living a life of good works:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10).

Salvation is the gift of God. No one is, or ever could be, good enough to deserve it. That is precisely why Christ came into the world - to die for the sins of people like you and me. Good works in the Christian life are the believer's response to God's gracious love - not the other way around. They are the *fruit* of salvation - not the means to attaining it. It is important that we always remember this because trying to be "good enough" for God, as most religions of the world endeavor to do, is a losing battle which is sure to tie up a believer in frustration, doubts and condemnation. Remember, we are accepted by God because of his grace, through faith in Christ, not because of any worthiness on our own part. Good works must spring from this certainty of God's forgiveness, acceptance and love for us as his children - in Christ!

The Mind of Christ

The principle key for the Christian believer in living a Christ-like life of love and service towards others is learning to live with the "mind of Christ" so as to think and live as he did (I Cor. 2:16; I John 2:6). This is a deliberate process accomplished by the free-will decision of each and every believer. It involves a moment by moment, day by day decision to think as Christ would think and live as Christ would live. As we do this, God works with us and in us by way of his Spirit, to help us to grow as his children and to help us accomplish his will in our lives (Rom. 8:28-30; Phil. 2:13; II Cor. 3:17-18). This way of life is, therefore, a process of growing and maturing as a child in God's family. Though no one will ever master this way of life perfectly before Christ's return, it is still the goal and ideal for which we strive. As we endeavor to live with this mind of Christ, the Book of Ephesians states:

... we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph. 4:14-16).

As each believer lives with the mind of Christ we all grow together as the body of Christ. By speaking and living the truth in love, we are able to care for each other, as well as to bring the knowledge of Christ to the world so that others may hear, be saved and be brought into the family of God.

The Renewed Mind

Living with the mind of Christ is accomplished by the process of renewing our minds. This means that we consciously decide to change the way we think by replacing thoughts which are contrary to Christ's character with those which are in accordance with it. This renewed mind walk of learning to think and live as Christ did is a matter of becoming in practice what spiritually we already are in Christ. Christ is in us already by way of the Spirit but we

must, by our own free-will decision, choose to put on the mind of Christ in our day to day lives - to think as he would think and live as he would live. This is the essence of being a disciple, or follower, of Christ. God's Spirit will not take control of us and force us to live this way. Instead, the choice is always ours - to live as obedient children in a manner worthy of God's love or to conform to the ways of the world (I Peter 1:13-16). Look at Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2).

As Christians who have been saved by God's grace we now offer ourselves in thankfulness as "living sacrifices" to God. This we do by living a life that is holy and well pleasing to God. A "holy" life is a life that has different standards from the world. As children in God's family we live by the principles, standards and goals which God has set forth within the Bible rather than by what the world says. We do not learn to love by watching television and saying, "Oh, that must be what true love is!" No, we base our understanding of love and truth on what the Scriptures teach rather than what the world would have us believe. The Bible, the holy Scriptures, must be our only standard for truth in this life - all else will lead only to confusion and error (Matt. 4:4; 22:29; II Tim. 3:16-17).

The Example of Christ

In learning to live a Christ-like life the Christian believer should focus his or her study of the scriptures on two primary sections of the Bible:

1. The life and teaching of Christ as presented in the Gospels - in the light of their Old Testament background.
2. The New Testament Letters to the Christian churches and believers - in the

light of the new covenant which Christ has established.

In studying the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospels we should always remember that it is the *principles* of love and truth by which Jesus lived that we are to imitate - not the specific tasks or ministry of Christ. In other words, we do not have to go to Jerusalem because Jesus went there, nor do we minister primarily to the Jews just because he did, nor do we need to be crucified as he was. Christ had a specific ministry to perform in the historical situation in which he lived. He was sent by God specifically as a servant to Israel within his earthly ministry and then to die as the ransom sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. It is, therefore, the principles of love and truth which he taught and exhibited that are of eternal relevance. These same principles must be applied by us today in the historical, geographical and cultural contexts of our own lives.

Jesus summed up the principles by which he lived in the two Old Testament commandments which he said were the sum and substance of all the ethical teaching of the Bible. The Gospel of Matthew records this:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:34-40).

Throughout his life and ministry Jesus taught and showed how to live this life of love. In doing this he went beyond the common understanding of the Old Testament Law of his day and showed that what God truly wanted were people who would love and worship him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24) - from the heart - going *beyond* the external rules and regulations which governed the affairs of men (Matt. 9:13; Mk. 12:32-34; Luke 6:1-11). No matter how much of a knowledge of the Bible we may gain in our lives it is this law of love as summarized in the simple and succinct statements of Christ to love

God and to love your neighbor as yourself that will always be the foundation for right Christian living. These are statements that anyone of sound mind can understand and then apply to the many, many situations which life may present. Learning to think and live this way is learning to think and live like Christ.

The New Testament Letters

As a result of Christ's life, death, resurrection and the giving of holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, it is now possible for God's people to love and worship God as their Father in spirit and in truth (Eph. 2:18-22; Phil. 3:3). With the giving of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost the age of the new covenant began. This new covenant is not based on external ordinances, rituals or a written code of law. Instead, it is based upon the once for all time sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world, and upon the Spirit of God which is given to every believer in Christ (Heb. 9:15; II Cor. 3:6). As a result, the Christian believer is now able to live in the freedom and confidence of a child of God and to serve others with a Christ-like love from the heart. Look at the following verse from the New Testament Letters:

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ ... but now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:4-6).

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire Law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13-14).

The lifestyle of living in love, or living in the Spirit, is the very essence of the Christ-like life of the Christian believer. This principle is called within the New Testament Letters the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). This is the rule, or principle, by which Christians within the age of the new covenant are to live. Instead of being a legal code of rules and regulations, this law of Christ is summed up in the all encompassing concept of loving God and loving

one's fellowman. This life of love is based on the life of Christ himself and is flexible enough to be applied to any historical or cultural situation which this life can bring. The law of Christ is "Christ-centered" rather than "rule centered." It tells us to think and live like Christ rather than focus on rules or laws which govern the affairs of men. The Christ-like life goes beyond a written legal code of conduct (Gal. 5:23) so as to fulfill the intent of God's commands in the many varied situations which this life can bring. It focuses on loving and caring for people just as Christ did.

The New Testament Letters speak of this lifestyle as "living" or "walking" in: "love" (Eph. 5:1-2; Rom. 13:8-10; etc.), "the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-25; Rom. 8:1-13; etc.) or "the light" (Eph. 5:8-9; I John 1:5-9). Each of these phrases emphasizes the same basic truth - a Christ-like life of love and truth. Let's look at some examples from the NT letters:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law (Gal. 5:16-23).

The contrast between the Christ-like life of love and truth and the worldly lifestyle based on the works of the flesh (the sinful nature) is obvious. Christians should have no part in the works of the flesh since we are not to be conformed to the world but instead to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Since, however, we live in the world, it is certain that there will always be a battle taking place between the godly lifestyle of living in the Spirit and the world's lifestyle of the works of the flesh. The "battlefield" for this ongoing spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-12) is primarily in the believer's mind and it is here that the Christian believer must learn to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). When we sin, as we all do at times, we come to God as our Father and express our regret and sorrow by confessing our sins to him. Since he is our loving Father, we have his assurance that he will always forgive us so that we may continue to walk in intimate fellowship with him. Look at the Letter of I John:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:5-10).

The Christian life is a life of living as Christ lived. As we live this way it is our joy and privilege to walk in intimate fellowship with God as our Father and with Jesus his Son. As children in God's family we are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17) and we are able to share fully in all that is our rightful inheritance in Christ. Since we now have God's Spirit as the "firstfruits" of that inheritance, we are even now able to walk in fellowship with God day by day. The intimacy of that fellowship is directly proportional to our

decision to put on the mind of Christ so as to walk in the light as he is light.

Our Christian Responsibilities

When we confessed Jesus as our Lord we became subject to him as our Lord and Christ. As his servants and members of his church, believers are responsible to live for him in every aspect of their lives (Col. 3:24). This includes family responsibilities, job responsibilities or any other area of our lives. In addition, Christian believers have two special responsibilities which God has assigned specifically to the church. First, we are responsible to care for and strengthen our fellow brothers and sisters within the body of Christ in whatever way that we can. Look at the Book of Philippians:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:1-5).

Though Christians are instructed to "do good to all men," they should make a special effort to do good "to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). These same thoughts are repeated over and over within the New Testament Letters and the basic idea is certainly not difficult to understand. As God's family and members of the church of the body of Christ, we are all uniquely bound together and therefore have a special obligation to care for each other (cp. Rom 12:1-15:7; I Cor. 12-13; Eph. 4:1-6:9; Col. 3:1-17). We are to "carry each other's burdens, and in this way ... fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2).

The second responsibility which God has specifically assigned to the church is to share the good news of salvation by grace through believing in Jesus Christ with others throughout the world (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:7-8; II Cor. 3:6-5:21). This

responsibility is called the ministry of reconciliation within the Book of II Corinthians. God has given the church a special role to play in the accomplishing of his plan of salvation. If others are to hear about God's love and grace it must come through the efforts of those who have themselves received God's wonderful gift of salvation. As the church of God and citizens of God's kingdom we are ambassadors for Christ within this world. Look at the following verses:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (II Cor. 5:14-21).

As Christians we have the joy and privilege of "shining like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life" (Phil. 2:14-16). We are ambassadors for Christ and are representing him in this world. As we share the truths of God's love and salvation with others we are able to help them believe and be reconciled to God. What an incredible truth that God has entrusted this responsibility to us, his people. Though we may not all be wonderful speakers or evangelists we can all aid in the accomplishment of this ministry of reconciliation. In our daily lives and in our personal contacts with others we are witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ by all that we do. Through our Christ-like lives, our

sharing of God's Word with others or even helping those with special ministries in this regard, we can all do our part in helping others "to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4). As Jesus stated, "...if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42). Let us therefore be faithful to this responsibility which God has entrusted to us for there is no greater task or more noble purpose to be accomplished in this life.

The Judgment of Believers

After Christ's second coming each Christian believer will "give account of himself before God" (Rom. 14:9-12) and be judged as to his or her faithfulness in carrying out their Christian responsibilities in this life (II Cor. 5:10). Since "in Christ" we have already been judged and found "not guilty" as regards our acceptance with God and future salvation (Rom. 3:22-24; 8:1-3), this judgment will be in respect to rewards which have been earned through faithful service to our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:8-15).

Believers will stand before Christ in their already glorified bodies and in assurance of being with him forever since this transformation takes place instantaneously at Christ's return when believers are caught up to meet him in the air (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:50-57). As our Lord, Jesus will himself be the judge, on God's behalf, and his judgment will be absolutely just (II Tim. 4:1,8). It will be a judgment based not only on outward acts but also on the inward motives of the heart (I Cor. 4:1-5). All who have rendered faithful service for Christ will "receive their own reward according to their own labor" (I Cor. 3:8). Those whose work will prove to be of poor quality will have their work "burned up" but they themselves "will be saved, though only as one escaping through the flames" (I Cor. 3:10-15).

Though the Bible tells us little about these future rewards, it is evident that how we live our lives in this present life will have direct bearing on the privileges, honors, and responsibilities that will be ours in the kingdom of God of the coming age. Salvation is absolutely by grace, through faith, but the believer in Christ is also assured that there will be glorious rewards for those who faithfully serve

him. The Book of Colossians puts the entire Christ-like life of the believer in proper perspective for us:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your

wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged ...

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism (Col. 3:1-25).

This is the Christ-like life of the believer. It is a life of loving service to others based on the truth of God's Word. As we live faithfully for God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord we can enjoy the fellowship of that relationship even now while looking expectantly to the "praise, glory and honor" that we will receive "when Jesus Christ is revealed" (I Pet. 1:7). Therefore,

...my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58).

[This article is adapted from chapter 5 of this writer's booklet *God's Plan of Salvation*.]

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Why House Church?

by Mark M. Mattison
Grand Rapids, Michigan

House churches worldwide are growing as never before. Ironically, this movement is the antithesis of the mega-church dream pursued in an age when "bigger is better." What is the house church ideal, and why do some Christians pursue it?

What is a House Church?

A house church is a group of Christians who meet regularly in the intimacy of homes rather than in formal church buildings. No one denies that the earliest Christians met in houses. The book of Acts regularly describes Christian assemblies in peoples' homes (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 20:20). Church meetings are recorded in the homes of John's mother (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:40), Aquilla and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), Gaius (Rom. 16:23), Nympha (Col. 4:15), and Philemon (Philem. 2).

The Theology of Church

Was this practice pragmatic, or was there a theology behind it? One of the linchpins of new covenant truth is that every member of the body is uniquely gifted to contribute to the edification of the whole. What better way to express this reality than by meeting in small groups in the intimacy of homes? Otherwise, we may be tempted to cast our religious activities in the role of old covenant institutions.

Consider these common features of church life today. Many Christians assemble in church buildings frequently called "houses of God." They gather in the "sanctuary" (the consecrated, holy room for worship), often with an "altar" in front. They listen to "the ordained minister" as he "preaches" and presides over the "sacraments." He alone is authorized to do many of these activities, including pronouncing the "benediction" at the close of the service. All of this runs counter to new covenant truth as revealed in the Scriptures. After all, "the Most High does not live in houses made by men" (Acts 7:48, NIV), so it cannot be proper to speak of "the house of God" as if the church building were a temple. Nor do altars have relevance for the new covenant church, since Christ's sacrifice on the cross fulfilled the old covenant's sacrificial system (Heb.

8-10). Similarly, the new covenant leaves no room for sanctuaries or holy places.

For that matter, who are the "ordained ministers" in the body of Christ? According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, "ordain" means "to invest officially with ministerial or priestly authority." When Christ died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, indicating that no longer would people need the mediation of a priesthood and temple to approach God. At that moment a new covenant was sealed and all believers, not just a privileged few, were ordained as priests (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6). Furthermore, all believers are called to ministry. The primary purpose of church leaders is not "to minister," but "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (*Eph. 4:12, NRSV*).

In other words, by God's reckoning all Christians are ordained ministers. Thus the priesthood of all believers, a well-known Protestant doctrine, is implicitly denied whenever a denominationally-ordained "minister" exercises his *exclusive* authority to preach the gospel or pronounce a benediction like that described in Numbers 6:22-27. These are priestly privileges which should be open to all believers, regardless of seminary education or ecclesiastical rank.

The Practice of Church

According to the New Testament, Christians are to meet together to exhort one another, urging one another on to good deeds (cf. Heb. 10:24,25). Scripture is replete with this language of "one another." Yet how often is this Scriptural principle negated by the fact that only one person in the church (the pastor) does all the exhorting? Strange as it may seem, the preaching of the gospel rarely happened in church assemblies throughout the New Testament period. The word "preach" or "proclaim" (*kerusso*) always occurs with reference to evangelizing outside of the church. What happened within the church was not "preaching," but "teaching." Such teaching was not a polished oratory or a thirty-minute monologue, but a give-and-take dialogue. For example, in Acts 20:7, we read that Paul "spoke (Gr. *dielegeto*) to the people" (NIV). The word *dielegeto* implies more of a "dialogue" than an oratory. The teacher was accountable to the church for what he said (cf. Acts 17:11). By

contrast, how would we be received in the church today if we interrupted a "pastor's sermon" with questions?

The early church regularly assembled in members' homes to share the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42,46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20; Jude 12). This was a complete meal accompanied by a single loaf of bread and cup of wine, visible symbols of their unity (1 Cor. 10:16,17). This shared communion, not a sermon, was the focal point of their meeting. They also prayed, studied Scripture, and sang together, but always with the purpose of edifying the body (cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Everyone, not just a few people, came with something to share - like a song, a teaching, or a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 14:26).

The Leadership of the Church

In the context of this mutual, one-another ministry, the New Testament church had no need for a one-man minister. Each church was led by example by a group of mature people, not a one-man pastor fresh out of Bible college. These leaders were known interchangeably as "pastors," "elders," and "overseers." For example, Paul called together the "elders" of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17), addressed them as "overseers," and asked them to "shepherd" or "pastor" the church (v. 28; cf. also 1 Pet. 5:1,2). There were no "grades" of authority among leaders; elders were pastors and pastors were elders.

Timothy and Titus are often cited as exceptions - individual pastors who presided over elders. But they were traveling evangelists, not established pastors/elders (cf. 2 Tim. 4:5,9-13,21; Tit. 1:5; 3:12). The number of pastors/elders appointed in the churches was always plural (cf. Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:7).

The Rise of the Clergy

In the second century, however, individual leaders began to rise in the churches. "Pastors" began to emerge from the groups of "elders" and began to assume far more than their share of ministry. In the third century, these leaders became the upper echelon of a "clerical" [priestly] order as distinguished from "the laity" [the people]. This is one reason that pastoral burdens today are so great - one man (the pastor) is often expected to be the church's theologian, speaker, teacher, evangelist,

administrator, and counselor. Growing churches in the second and third centuries began to stop multiplying as small house churches, and people began to donate their houses for renovation as church edifices. In the fourth century, Christians began erecting large basilicas to accommodate church assemblies. Moving out of living rooms and dining rooms into larger structures made the Lord's Supper logistically difficult to share. As a result, the loaf and the cup were separated from the meal, and the interpersonal meal with its informal fellowship was discontinued. However, the communion experience remained the focal point of the church's time together.

During the Reformation, Protestants wanted to downplay subjective experience and emphasize doctrine. To this end they moved the "mass" from the center of the service and replaced it with "the preaching of the Word." Communion became even less important and the polished sermon became the focal point of the church's experience. Professing the priesthood of all believers in name only, Protestant "ministers" continued to function in the capacity of priests. And so they continue - well-intentioned as they are - to this day.

House Church Life

The most effective way to reclaim the simplicity of the New Testament's church life is to follow its principles and patterns. Without real estate, buildings, staff salaries, utilities, and mortgages, the church's financial resources can be reallocated for more effective ministry. Without pulpits, pews, or sermons, the church can be free to pursue the mutual ministry of every believer in the assembly. Mutual participation is far more attainable in the small-group setting of living rooms. Furthermore, without the limitations of a church building's size, house churches can multiply indefinitely.

Are these teachings too incredible? Do they seem unrealistic and impracticable? Consider visiting a house church or studying the issue deeper. You may find that house church is the key to renewal in Christendom today.

[This article appears in *The Open House Church* web-site at: www.mindspring.com/~mmattison]

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The Lord's Supper

A Study of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

by Jon Zens

Introduction

In the New Testament we should be struck by the utter simplicity that characterized life in the early churches. We are given a broad picture of church life, but many particulars - which are troublesome for us - are left untouched by the New Testament. As time elapsed, the visible church lost its original simplicity and became enmeshed in a quagmire of ecclesiastical machinery and theological speculation.

The Lord's Supper is a case in point. There is a simplicity about this ordinance in the sketchy New Testament data. Yet in post-apostolic times the remembrance meal (1) became embedded in hierarchical church structures so that it became a mysterious ritual to be "administered" by the "ordained," and (2) ended up being the source of endless speculation about "what happens" in the "sacrament."¹

The evidence indicates that this remembrance meal, and the instruction which accompanied it, was a centerpoint in Christian assemblies (cf. Acts 20:7). Eating together in the "breaking of bread" and remembering the Lord in the Supper were virtually synonymous in Christian worship.² Obviously, many things have changed in our practice since the early days. In this article, I would like to explore some basic points concerning the Lord's Supper - based on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - and compare them with our conceptions and practices.

The Historical Structure of the Supper

First of all, it will be helpful to isolate the threefold historical structure that exists in the institution of the Supper itself. Only by holding these three perspectives in proper balance can we even hope to approach the Supper correctly.

1. Remember the Past

In the Lord's Supper we remember the past. The covenant that brings us the forgiveness of sins was ratified, or "cut," by the shedding of Christ's blood. The Lord instituted the Supper on the eve of His impending death in the context of a Passover meal. "Remembrance" itself is a covenantal word. The Israelites were often commanded to "remember" God's acts of covenant faithfulness. In the Supper, Jesus has given us an ordinance by which we continually remember that our blessings were purchased through a costly price.

2. Enjoy the Present

In the Lord's Supper, we enjoy the present. Jesus has brought us into fellowship with others in the new covenant. When we come together "as a church," we can eat as a body in the presence of the Lord Jesus. The emphasis here is on a joyous meal, a covenant celebration. Again, in the Old Testament covenantal meals which celebrated the mighty acts of God on their behalf were enjoyed (Exod. 24:11). The pattern of redemptive history is that celebrative meals follow covenant enactment.

3. Look Forward to the Future

In the Supper, we look forward to the future: "you do show the Lord's death until he comes." This ordinance is to be repeated ("as often as you do it") until Christ returns. Each time we proclaim His death in the Supper, we are also reminded that He is returning. In His death, burial and resurrection Christ was removed from us physically. The Holy Spirit now gives us Christ's presence. When He returns, our faith will become sight.

Given these three dimensions - past, present, future - it is no wonder that in the early church the Lord's Supper was "the central action in Christian worship."³ Although there is overlap, we might rightly generalize and say that in the Supper our faith looks back to the cross (Rom. 3:25), our love for Jesus and the saints is kindled by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5), and our hope is stirred up as we long for His return (Heb. 9:28; cf. 1 Cor. 13:13).

The past dimension gives the Supper its objective character - we come together to remember the definitive work of Christ. The present dimension

¹William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*, 1967, pp. 102, 104.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

emphasizes the Supper's social character - in order to remember His body, we must be one body (1 Cor. 10:16,17). The future dimension recognizes the tension of Christian experience - we enjoy now only the first-fruits, and long for the full harvest (Rom. 8:18,23).

The Historical Setting of the Supper

An Overview of 1 Corinthians 11:17ff

In the remark, "your meetings do more harm than good" (11:17), Paul probably has in view all the concerns he covers through 14:40.¹ These issues relate to "the disorders...in the public assemblies of the congregation."²

The first issue Paul isolates has to do with divisions evident "when they came together as a church" (11:18). These divisions had a different twist, but certainly could not be totally divorced from the divisions described in 1:10-12; 3:3,4. Specifically, these divisions came to expression in connection with their practice of the Lord's Supper (which also involved a meal together; 11:20-22).

Paul does not condemn the meal aspect of their gathering. Rather, he rebukes their contradiction of what the Lord's Supper signifies - the unity of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16,17). The way they were coming together reflected schism, not bondedness. They were not eating together as a unit. The poor were thereby humiliated. The giving nature of Christ was not reflected in their sharing of food with one another. In such a setting, the Lord's Supper could only be done "unworthily" because the very way in which they came together was a denial of all that the Supper signified.

In order to correct this horrible situation, Paul recalls the apostolic tradition he delivered to them concerning the institution of this ordinance (11:23-26). Obviously, the focus of the Supper is Christ - we come together to remember Him. But this has social implications. It is impossible to eat the Lord's Supper if the brethren come together in disunity - eating at different times, and clustering in various separated groupings (11:20).

Verses 27-32 reflect the implications that Paul sees when the true meaning of the Supper is applied

to the Corinthian situation. It is a very serious matter to go through the motions of the Supper together in a state of disharmony and division. Contextually, eating and drinking in an "unworthy manner" refers to the divided way in which the Corinthians were coming together (this is reinforced in vv. 33,34).

There is such a vital, organic connection between Christ and the body of His people on earth, that to eat and drink the Supper when the church is in a divided state is to sin against the body and blood of the Lord. You cannot sin against the brotherhood without also sinning against Christ (1 Cor. 8:12; cf. Acts 9:4). Thus self-examination is in order with a view toward maintaining, and not violating, the unity of the body that is mandatory in the remembrance of the meal. Various visitations of God upon the saints occurred here because of their selfish, loveless actions that resulted in body divisions (11:30). Godly repentance is in order so that the body would be healed, and again reflect the oneness Christians have in Christ (11:31,32).

In vv. 33,34 Paul returns to where the problems began with some concluding remarks. Again, Paul assumes the propriety of their "coming together to eat" (11:33a). But in such meetings, they must wait until all are gathered before they eat (11:33b). If some are hungry and cannot wait, they should "fill up" at home. This would ensure that at the public gathering, the body would be one at the table, and not divided by (wealthy) early eaters who thus left the poor with nothing.

Some Implications/Questions

Is A Meal Part of the Lord's Supper?

At this point, I would have to answer the question by saying that to isolate the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper from a meal is certainly unnatural. All the evidence points to the integral connection of the Lord's Supper with a meal. Consider the following:

1. The old covenant Passover involved a meal "which was meant to satisfy hunger as well as to commemorate the Exodus."³ The evidence in Matthew, Mark and Luke suggests that the Last

¹Charles Hodge, *I Corinthians*, p. 216; R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I & 2 Corinthians*, p. 455.

²Lenski, p. 454.

³Marcus Dods, *The Epositers Bible: I Cor.*, V, 1940, p. 683.

Supper was a Passover meal.¹ Since Christ ate the Passover dinner with His disciples before He instituted the ordinance, the early church continued that practice by eating an evening meal (often referred to as a "love feast") together before the Lord's Supper was observed.²

2. The "blood of the covenant" language (Matt. 26:28) suggests a parallel of the Lord's Supper with Exodus 24, where after the Mosaic covenant was ratified with blood, a fellowship meal was enjoyed (24:11).

3. In the context of Jesus' institution of the Supper, He and His disciples were eating a meal, i.e. "while they were eating" (Matt. 26:26; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25).

4. The accounts in Acts indicate that the brethren were fond of "breaking bread" (Acts 2:42,46; 20:7) together. Few would deny that "breaking bread" and the "Lord's Supper" were almost synonymous in the practice of the early church.³

5. In 1 Corinthians 11 we find that "coming together to eat" (v. 33) and "coming together as a church" (v. 18) coincide. These meals were called agape - love feasts - and became a marked feature of the early church. On a fixed day, generally the first day of the week, the Christians assembled, each bringing what he could as a contribution to the feast: fish, poultry, joints of meat, cheese, milk, honey, fruit, wine and bread. In some places the proceedings began by partaking of the consecrated bread and wine; but in other places physical appetite was first appeased by partaking of the meal provided, and after that the bread and wine were handed round.⁴

Lenski asserts that "the Agape is not a divine institution. Therefore Paul lays down no regulations concerning it."⁵ However, while there is truth in his remark, it would seem that the burden of proof rests on him to show what sense Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 make if the ordinance is removed from a meal context. Just how do we

propose to relate the Lord's Supper to the little piece of bread and the sip of wine that characterize our services?

Hodge puts a wedge between the Lord's Supper and a "common meal." Thus he believes Paul's words in 11:23-26 "are specially designed to separate the Lord's Supper as a religious rite from the social element with which it was combined."⁶ But it is not a question of "either/or." The Lord's Supper was embedded in a common meal. What Hodge separates, the early church viewed together. The Corinthian abuse did not rule out the meal dimension (11:33).

It was apparently "the very purpose of these congregational gatherings to celebrate the Lord's Supper."⁷ But the disorderly actions of the Corinthians made it impossible to have the Supper. Instead of taking all the food that was brought and apportioning it to all who were present so that each should receive a proper share, cliques were formed, and relatives, friends, those of one clique ate together, probably at private tables, the rich and prosperous separated from the poor, letting those who could bring little or nothing sit by themselves....when the Agape ceased to be an Agape, the Sacrament was also virtually impossible.⁸

Thus, for Lenski to say later that "to discern the Lord's body means to perceive that in the Sacrament that body is really present and received"⁹ totally misses the point of the context. The Corinthian problem was not related to "the elements" in the Supper, but to their broken relationships in the body of Christ.

The warnings and judgments of 11:27-32, therefore, must be seen in light of this problem which is twice articulated by Paul before and after the "institution" section (11:23-26). It appears to me that 11:23-32 has more often than not been considered in isolation from that which surrounds it. This has led to serious misunderstandings concerning taking the Supper "unworthily" and examining one's self.

What Does "Unworthily" Mean?

¹Barclay, pp. 27,28.

²Robert G. Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Cor.*, 1977, p. 141.

³Hodge, pp. 214,215.

⁴Dods, p. 683.

⁵Lenski, p. 462.

⁶Hodge, p. 235; cf. pp. 216,219,220.

⁷Lenski, p. 457.

⁸Ibid., pp. 458,459.

⁹Ibid., pp. 482.

Clearly from the context, it means that the Corinthian gatherings were for the worse, and brought judgment, because "in their partiality and divisive spirit, they contradicted the truth of oneness in Christ."¹ Historically, the focus has been on the individual discerning the Lord properly "in the elements,"² but, as Barclay points out:

The person condemned is not the person who does not discern that the elements he takes in his hands are the Lord's body. The person condemned is the person who does not discern that Christians are the Lord's body, and must be in unity before they dare approach the sacrament.³

Why Is There "Self-examination"?

If it were not for the problems in Corinth, we would be left with only the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 to a disorderly church. He was speaking to a situation where God's hand had come upon Christians. It seems to me that we have removed "self-examination" out of its context and blown it out of proportion. Would Paul direct words parallel with 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 to a basically orderly gospel church? Given the state of many churches today, Paul's warnings are certainly in order!

Traditionally, "examine yourself" has focused on the preparedness of an individual for taking communion. As Lenski comments, "the communicant is to test himself as to his fitness for the Sacrament."⁴ There is a place for self-examination, but when the Supper has been removed from its fellowship-meal context - its social dimension - the tendency has been for self-examination to be misunderstood and misapplied.

What Should the "Mood" Be in the Lord's Supper?

It should be one of celebration and joy. The table should not be a place of "gloom."⁵ However, in

too many cases the atmosphere at the Lord's Supper is more like a funeral than a festival. We cannot be like the two sorrowful men on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:17,21). These men's hearts came alive with joy when Jesus made Himself known to them in the "breaking of bread" (Luke 24:30-35).

Obviously, our blessings have come through a great price. We cannot reflect on the cross without a due sense of sobriety. But even from Christ's perspective there was "joy" mixed in with the knowledge of His impending death (Heb. 12:2). With joy we can remember His death in the past, enjoy His presence with us now, and look forward to His glorious return.

Do We Share Our Goods in the Supper?

Most of the time, the Lord's Supper in the early church was an occasion to share with the poor. For many, for the slaves and the poor, the Lord's Supper must have been the one real meal of the week. The idea of a tiny piece of bread and sip of wine bears no relation at all to the Lord's Supper as it originally was.⁶ There is something here in the spirit of all this that we need to recapture in our Lord's Suppers.

Why Do We Practice the Supper in Such a Different Way?

It is obvious that there is little, if any, resemblance of our Lord's Supper practice to that of the early church. Hodge admits that "these disorders [in Corinth] were of such a kind which, according to our method of celebrating that sacrament, seems almost unaccountable."⁷ Barclay observes:

There can be no two things more different than the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a Corinthian home in the first century and a cathedral in the twentieth century. The things are so different that it is almost possible to say that they bear no relationship to each other whatsoever.⁸

The essential characteristic of our practice is its non-fellowship, non-meal setting. We try to have a

¹Gromacki, p. 144.

²Hodge, p. 231.

³Barclay, p. 109.

⁴Lenski, p. 480.

⁵Hodge, p. 233.

⁶Barclay, p. 100.

⁷Hodge, p. 214.

⁸Barclay, p. 99.

Supper without a meal! The question we must face is this: are we right in continuing this individualistic approach? In light of all the Biblical evidence, does not our practice look out of order? On what textual basis can we continue our "tiny piece of bread and sip of wine" method?

The history of what happened is easy to trace. In time, the Agape was separated from the Supper, and it was "prohibited" by the Council at Carthage (AD 397).¹ Abuses of the Agape are given as the reason why it faded out of church life.² But every doctrine and practice have been abused in some way. We would not do anything if we stopped because of abuses. The New Testament answer is to correct abuses, not to cease doing right because of abuse.

Implementing the Lord's Supper

If the New Testament data would suggest that our practice of the Supper needs to be changed, then how are we going to do it? First of all, the fact that our Lord's Supper practice is so "out of context" from early church practice is indicative of a broader problem: our church life in general is out of whack. Thus, the Lord's Supper issue is an indicator of some deeply-rooted problems in our overall conception of "church."

This means, secondly, that in most churches a period of time involving patient instruction and responsible experimentation and change is necessary. Traditions that block obedience and stifle edification die hard. So we must function in a tension where we consider (1) the necessity to obey light discovered from the New Testament, and (2) the necessity to bear patiently with those who are struggling. If we emphasize #1 without #2, we will cause strife to abound. If we emphasize #2 without #1 nothing will ever change and the status quo will go on.

Thirdly, it is important to see that capturing the spirit of the New Testament church life is the key. We are not talking about just changing the form to a situation where the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the context of a fellowship meal. Rather, when we get a vision of the kind of care and fellowship that should characterize Christian assemblies, we will see the value, blessing and edification of remembering the

Lord together in a meal context. Changing a form cannot produce life. Instead, vibrant life brings with it a strong desire to employ those forms which will maximize edification.

As churches get ahold of New Testament principles, they can freely work out creative ways to implement a remembrance meal that meets the needs and particulars of their circumstances. I believe that many saints know (painfully) in their hearts that there is something missing in the churches' practice of the Supper. May a consideration of the historical structure and setting of the Supper help us in recovering the truth as it is in Jesus.

[This article appears in the "Open House Church" web-site - see previous article - where it is reprinted by permission from *Searching Together*, Autumn Quarter 1983, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 23-29.]

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Report

The Unity of the Spirit

With this issue *The Unity of the Spirit* completes its twelfth issue since its beginning three years ago. What began as a newsletter for close acquaintances has grown to encompass readers in almost all fifty states of the USA and several foreign countries. Most of these readers are also active participants in their own home fellowship, church or ministry.

Beginning with the next issue Chuck and Marilee LaMattina - of *Grace Ministry USA* - will be helping to edit *The Unity of the Spirit* together with Scot Hahn, my wife Dorota and myself. All of these, together with many others, have already played a major role in *The Unity of the Spirit* to date. My thanks to all.

Richie Temple

¹Hodge, p. 210; Lenski, p. 488; Barclay, p. 60.

²Hodge, p. 219; Barclay, pp. 60,61.

Living Letters

Dear *Unity*,

I just received the latest *Unity of the Spirit* and wanted to let you know I thought it was the best yet. I really liked your letter on home fellowships but everything else was also great!

Pray for our fellowship as we pray also for yours. Love to all the believers.

Rick Waite and family,
Wendell, North Carolina

Dear *Unity*,

God bless you mightily in Christ Jesus! Thank you so much for you newsletter and the booklet "God's Plan of Salvation." The booklet was exceptionally well written and full of wonderful truths.

I will look forward to receiving the newsletter "The Unity of the Spirit." It's great to read insights from our brothers and sisters around the country. I will pass the newsletter and booklet along to the other saints here in Rochester. We will include you in our prayer list along with Grace Ministry.

Once again, Thank you and God bless!

Sincerely in His Service,
Joe Padilla
Rochester, New York

Dear *Unity*:

Greetings to you all. May all of God's good and perfect gifts be yours throughout the new year! May his love surround you and may He grant you health and happiness!

Rejoicing with you in Jesus and the kingdom hope! Be blessed and a blessing!

I love you all!
Tracy Savage
St. Petersburg, Russia

Dear *Unity*,

I don't remember when I wrote you last time, so I don't know what I thanked you for, and what not, so I thank you for everything: for the copies of *The Unity of Spirit*, your short notes etc.

And – as the holidays are here – we should send you our heartfelt greetings. We hope you will have peaceful holidays and a happy new year. As for us, we work very much, but we still can work, which is the most important thing. I remember again and again our time together at the Bible Conference in Poland, and I pray continually for you all.

Yours,
Ferenc and Elisabeth Jeszenszky
Budapest, Hungary

Dear *Unity*:

I just finished reading the latest issue of the "Unity of the Spirit" and I really enjoyed the articles about church leadership. Thanks again for sending it to me each time!

Chris Camillo,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear *Unity*:

Thank you for your newsletter. Please pray for my sisters and me as we endeavour to share the truth and accuracy of the Word here in Singapore.

God bless,
Katherine Khoo
Singapore

Dear *Unity*:

Thanks so much for the latest issue of your newsletter. It is always a joy to read.

The articles dealing with home fellowships are timely. So many, who once participated in fellowships, are now searching for the "right" church to belong to. When believers stop believing the message of the scriptures to the point of acting on it, the needs of the people will not be met.

"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24).

Sincerely in Christ,
Patrick Florio
Raleigh, North Carolina

The "Reality" is Found in Christ

Compare the Versions: Col. 2:16-17

KJV

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ.

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power; In him also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

NIV

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in your putting off the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

So then, just as you received Jesus as Lord and Christ, now live your lives in him, held firm by the faith you have been taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving.

Make sure that no one captivates you with the empty lure of a "philosophy" of the kind that human beings hand on, based on the principles of this world and not on Christ.

In him, in bodily form, lives divinity in all its fullness, and in him you too find your own fulfillment, in the one who is the head of every sovereign and ruling force. In him you have been circumcised, with a circumcision performed, not by human hand, but by the complete stripping of your natural self. This is circumcision according to Christ. You have been buried with him by your baptism; by which, too, you have been raised up with him through your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead.

Your were dead, because you were sinners and uncircumcised in body: he has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us every one of our sins. He has wiped out the record of our debt to the Law, which stood against us; he has destroyed it by nailing it to the cross; and he has stripped the sovereignties and the ruling forces, and paraded them in public, behind him in his triumphal procession.

Then never let anyone criticize you for what you eat or drink, or about observance of annual festivals, New Moons or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what was coming: the reality is the body of Christ.

NJB

Notes & Quotes on the Bible

The Old Covenant "Shadow" and New Covenant "Reality"

Most Bible students would agree that one of the most difficult areas of biblical study is the relationship between Old Testament prophecies and their New Testament fulfillment. Anyone who has spent much time studying NT quotations of OT passages has had to come face to face with the fact that many of these quotations do not appear to be "fulfilled" in what we in the western world of the 20th century would consider to be a literal way - not, at least, based upon their OT contexts. In his book *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* [Baker Books], E. Earl Ellis confronts the problem:

To many Christian readers, to say nothing of Jewish readers, the New Testament's interpretation of the Old appears to be exceedingly arbitrary. For example, Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son," refers to Israel's experience of the Exodus; how can Mt. 2:15 apply it to Jesus' sojourn in Egypt? In Psalm 8:4ff. the "son of man" given "glory" and "dominion" alludes to Adam or to Israel's king; how can Hebrews 2:8f. and I Cor. 15:27 apply the text to Jesus? If Gen. 15:6 and 2 Samuel 7 are predictions of Israel's future, how can the New Testament writers refer them to Jesus and to his followers, who include Gentiles as well as Jews? [p. 163].

These are interesting and difficult questions for anyone who wants to honestly and "correctly handle the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15 NIV). Without getting into too much detail I will deal with a couple of issues in this regard and then make reference to books which deal with the subject more completely.

Biblical Language

Any investigation of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament must take into account the manner of speaking and writing of the Old and New Testament writers. This

involves many different aspects but one that is especially important is the semitic use of hyperbole. G.B. Caird explains in his book *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*:

Hyperbole or overstatement is a figure of speech common to all languages. But among Semitic peoples its frequent use arises out of a habitual cast of mind, which I have called absoluteness - a tendency to think in extremes without qualification, in black and white without intervening shades of gray [p.110].

Such language can be seen throughout the Bible especially with contrasts between the absolute usage of words such as "love" and "hate" or "light" and "darkness" when the intended meaning is not in fact absolute (e.g. Gen. 29:30-31; Rom. 9:13). This use of hyperbole is especially prevalent in prophetic language. Caird goes on to explain:

Prophecy deals more often than not in absolutes. The prophets do not make carefully qualified predictions that the Israelites will be destroyed unless they repent. They make unqualified warnings of doom, accompanied by unqualified calls to repentance ... The prophet is sometimes as absolute in his optimism as in his forecasts of ruin.

Once we have acquired some familiarity with this prophetic idiom through instances in which the referent is incontrovertibly defined by the context, we may perhaps be ready to cope with advanced hyperbole in which no such direct clue is provided. The Book of Isaiah ends with a prediction of the final victory of God,

For, as the new heavens and the new earth which I am making shall endure in my sight, says the Lord, so shall your race and your name endure; and month by month at the new moon, week by week on the Sabbath, all mankind shall come to bow before me, says the Lord ... (Isa. 66:22-23).

Even if we constrict ourselves to the geographical limits of the prophet's world and to the level of population in his day, the prospect of all mankind traveling on weekly and monthly sightseeing tours to Jerusalem is too ludicrous to take literally; under ancient conditions of travel, time alone would be enough to make the idea impossibly absurd. We are dealing with a poet who has chosen this hyperbolic symbol to express his confidence in the coming of a new age in which the whole world will

accept the worship of the one true God [p. 112, 115-6].

This same use of hyperbole can be seen in many OT passages which many people today insist have not yet been fulfilled and must therefore be fulfilled in a strictly literal way in some future age. But this leads us to another and even more important question. Almost all such OT prophecies - including the one quoted above - are expressed in terms that mention the retention of old covenant practices - i.e. Sabbaths, New Moon celebrations, religious festivals, altars and sacrifices - all of which, according to the New Testament, are clearly abolished and done away through the redemptive work of Christ and the institution of the new covenant era of salvation. How then could such practices be reinstated in some future time or age, according to the will of God, without making the work of Christ of none effect?!

The Shadow and the Reality

After taking into account the type of biblical language employed in specific prophetic sections of the Old Testament we must always conform our own thinking about their New Testament fulfillment to the interpretation given by the inspired writers of the New Testament documents themselves. As to their understanding of this topic there can be no doubt that their entire perspective was shaped by Christ - both his own teachings and, most importantly, his redemptive work including his life, death, resurrection, ascension, giving of the Spirit and his future return. The following verses state explicitly the perspective which every NT writer shared:

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (II Cor. 1:20-22).

The Law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves (Heb. 10:1).

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration

or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

With the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost the new covenant has been established "once for all." There can never again be a reinstatement of the old covenant Law without making of none effect that which Christ has already accomplished through his life, death and resurrection. From the New Testament perspective the old covenant has simply been made obsolete (Heb. 8:13), and now *everything* is to be interpreted in the light of Christ and the new covenant which he has brought. This "spiritual perspective" from which the NT views the lives of new covenant believers can be summed up in many NT verses including the following:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (II Cor. 3:4-6).

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:6).

Simply put, with the coming of the new, the old is gone forever. As a result, all of life, including one's understanding of the OT scriptures, is to be viewed from this perspective. This does not mean that the old covenant regulations were not meant to be understood literally by the people of their day. However, with the coming of Christ the Old Testament "shadow" is now recognized. Spiritual realities that had never before been understood were made known (e.g. Matt. 13:11-12; Eph. 3:4-6; etc.), and the Old Testament is now to be interpreted in the light of these truths. In short, Christ's death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit were the decisive steps in God's plan of salvation. From that time onward "the old has gone, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17) and all of life is to be viewed in this way. As Ellis states concerning the Old Testament,

Not only persons and events but also its institutions were "a shadow of the good things to come" [ibid., p. 166].

In this light it seems impossible that there could ever be a time again when Old Testament institutions such as the sacrifices, religious festivals, Sabbaths, New Moon festivals, food laws, etc. of the Mosaic Law could ever again be instituted - that is, according to the will of God. With the coming of the new covenant "reality" in Christ the old covenant "shadow" is no longer necessary. In fact, to continue old covenant practices as though they are still prescribed by God can have very harmful effects on the body of Christ. As F.F. Bruce states regarding Paul's meaning in Col. 2:16-18:

Perhaps he means that the reality which was foreshadowed by the now obsolete ceremonial economy is the new order whose distinctive feature is that believers of the most diverse origins - Jews, Gentiles or whatnot - are alike united by faith to Christ, incorporated into him by the Spirit. To adhere now to the ceremonial regulations of a bygone age is to fail to grasp this new order, to fail (in other words) to "hold fast to the Head, by whom the whole body is equipped and supplied through its joints and ligaments and thus increases with the increase of God" (Co. 2:18f.) [F. F. Bruce, *The Time is Fulfilled*, Eerdmans, p. 78].

In short, any expectation that Old Testament prophecies (e.g. Zechariah 14; Isaiah 65-66; etc.) which speak of sacrifices, religious festivals, Sabbaths, altars, etc. are still to be fulfilled in a

strictly literal sense at some future time seem to have grave difficulties in the light of the new covenant that has already been established by Christ. Rather than searching the Old Testament for prophecies that one thinks have not yet been fulfilled and then teaching that they must be literally fulfilled in the future - including the re-institution of old covenant regulations - it seems far wiser to simply let the New Testament writers be our guide for the proper interpretation of the Old Testament - especially, as they point to the clear fulfillment of all God's purposes in Christ. The message of the new covenant is clear: the "shadow" has passed and the "reality" has come.

[Recommended books for studying this subject that are available from CBD include: *The Time is Fulfilled*, by F.F. Bruce; *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, by G.B. Caird. Also, available at book stores is the highly recommended *Jesus and Israel* by David Holwerda (Eerdmans) and, though difficult to find, the excellent work by E.E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity*, esp. pp. 147-172, (Baker)]

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