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# The Unity of the Spirit

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Dear Fellow-believers,

Throughout the NT the one God of the Bible, the creator of the heavens and the earth, is consistently defined and referred to as:

*"One God, the Father" (1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6);*

*"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:3; Peter 1:3);*

or, finally, *"God our Father" (Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:2).*

Of all the titles for God which are used throughout the Bible it is the title "Father" which best sums up his character as a personal God who loves and cares for his people. It is in fact God's desire to be a father of a people who would freely worship and serve him in love that is at the heart of God's purpose in creation itself. This is set forth beautifully in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians:

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have*

*redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Eph. 1:2-10 NIV).*

It was God the Father's "good pleasure" and "will" to bring about a family of children - "to the praise of his glorious grace." This was his central purpose in creation and it is towards this goal that all of history has been moving until this very day. Through the redemptive work of God's own Son and through the power of his own Spirit, God has already made it possible for all of God's people - whether Jew or Gentile - to enter into the most intimate of personal relationships with God as their own Father. Paul sets this forth clearly in his letter to the Galatians:

*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, so that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:4-6).*

It is this desire to have a people endowed with his own Spirit that is at the heart of God's desire to be "Father". As Jesus explained:

*... a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for Salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).*

God, who is spirit, cannot ultimately be worshipped through the works of men's hands: neither in a Jewish temple in Jerusalem nor through the temples of pagan religions. Stephen made this clear about the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and it was resistance to this line of thinking that ultimately cost him his life:

*However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:*

*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord.*

*Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all of these things? (Acts 7:48-50).*

Later in the Book of Acts Paul also made the same point in regards to the pagan temples that were so prevalent in the Greco-Roman world. When speaking to the Athenians he stated:

*The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:24-25).*

"God is Spirit" and it was the massive misunderstanding of his nature, his character and his purposes that caused resistance to the gospel truth in NT times - both in Israel and the pagan religions of the world. Unfortunately, the same can be said about much of Christendom today. The fleshly "works" of religious ritualistic practices "cannot please God" because God is Spirit. As such he can ultimately be "truly" worshipped only by those who

have received the Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-6).

It was for this purpose that God "poured out his Spirit" on Pentecost. It was always his desire to be a Father to a people in which he could "live" and "walk among" (II Cor. 6:16). As God stated in the OT and as we find fulfilled in the NT:

*I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters (II Cor. 6:18).*

Since Pentecost this gift of holy Spirit has been freely available to all of God's people, enabling them to "worship by the Spirit of God" (Phil. 3:3).

In short, it was for the purpose of building a new and permanent dwelling place for God - a "spiritual house" in which he could be truly worshipped - that Christ came. God our Father, who is Spirit, now "lives" or "dwells" in us his people - the true "temple of the living God" - thus, making it possible for us to know and worship him as a personal Father, in spirit and in truth. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians beautifully summarizes these truths:

*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:18-22).*

May we as God's people "walk worthy of this calling" to which God has called us. May we manifest to the world "the unity of the Spirit" to which we have been called so that others may see that for us, God's children, there is:

*One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:6).*

*Richie Temple*

## God's Empowering Presence

By Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

There is a true story told about a man named Ira Yates, who owned a sheep ranch in Texas during the 1930's. It was during this decade that the United States and much of the world, was going through a great financial depression. Even though Mr. Yates owned a sheep ranch, he found it very difficult to make a living. With little money for food and clothing for his family, like a lot of other people at the time, Yates and his family survived on a government subsidy.

Day after day as Yates grazed his sheep, he worried about how to pay his bills and care for his family. But then one day, a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and convinced Yates that there might be oil on his land. They asked for permission to do a test drill and Ira Yates agreed. As they began to drill, at 1,115 feet they hit a huge oil reserve. That first well came in at over 80,000 barrels a day! Translated into today's market value, that's about three million dollars a day from that single well. That was only the beginning! More wells were found and some were more than twice as productive as the first one.

To top it all off, after the oil had been pumped for more than forty years, a government test of just one of the wells showed it still had the potential to put out 125,000 barrels a day, and the once poor sheep rancher, Ira Yates, owned it all. Once Yates worried how to pay for food and clothing, all the while he was sitting on a treasure he never knew was there.

Now, this story is an apt illustration of how many Christians are sitting on a spiritual treasure infinitely more rich than a thousand oil fields. That treasure is the gift of God's holy Spirit. This gift dwells deep within the heart and soul of every child of God. Too many Christians live frustrated and fruitless lives, simply because they do not know the vast power and resources that belong to them in the gift of the holy Spirit. Psalm 62:11 boldly declares,

*God has spoken once; twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God (Ps. 62:11).<sup>1</sup>*

The dictionary tells us that power is the ability or capacity to perform effectively to gain specific results. Psalm 62 tells us that God has all the power and resources necessary to carry out His will to gain specific results. Power belongs to God! In the light of this truth, it is amazing to read what Jesus Christ said to his disciples shortly before his ascension into heaven.

*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)*

Jesus Christ promised his disciples that they would receive power, godly, divine power, through the holy Spirit. And this promise was not just for that select group of people. This promise is for everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle Peter proclaimed at the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ.

*Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:38, 39)*

Has the Lord God Almighty called you? Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Then the promised gift of the holy Spirit is yours, and so are all the rich resources of God that are in this gift!

The Bible tells us that those who are led by the Spirit, are the sons of God (Romans 8:14). We are told that we are regenerated, or born again by the Spirit and made heirs of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7). The Word of God tells us that every Christian can manifest the Spirit for the common good of the whole church (1 Corinthians 12: 7). We are also told that this promised holy Spirit seals us for the day of redemption. It is the guarantee of our future

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<sup>1</sup>All Scriptures, unless otherwise noted are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

inheritance of glory (Ephesians 1:13). And it is the Spirit that provides us with godly strength in our inner man (Ephesians 3:16).

Within every Christian there is a power that will enable us to make a grand moral transformation (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18). Deep within every believer there is a rich resource from which we can produce the divine qualities of love and joy and peace (Galatians 5:22, 23). And deep within every child of God, there is in the gift of God's Spirit, a unique blending of spiritual abilities making us all capable ministers of the gospel and effective witnesses for Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). If we are ever going to live lives of godly power and wisdom, it is essential for us to have a solid biblical understanding of the gift of the holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, there is almost no aspect of the Christian life that is so misunderstood! The truth about the holy Spirit has been muddied by misleading Bible translations, faulty interpretations, and by man-made religious traditions. In addition, the evidence and power of the Spirit in the lives of many believers has been stunted by emotional fears, and by extremely bizarre ungodly activities wrongly attributed to God's Spirit. In this book, my goal is to give you as much clear truth concerning the Spirit as I can. My purpose is not to simply fill your head with theological knowledge, but to set your heart on fire, and give you the confidence needed to experience this gift in your life. For as we experience the Spirit we can appropriate the salvation gained by Christ into our lives.

## ***What is the holy Spirit?***

So, what is the holy Spirit?<sup>1</sup> The holy Spirit is the very life force and power of God in action. In the book of Genesis, we have the first occurrence of the word "Spirit" and this will give us an indication of its usage and meaning. In Genesis we read,

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was*

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<sup>1</sup> This work will use the term "holy Spirit," with a small "h," instead of printing "Holy Spirit," which Bible translators have used to denote the third person of the Trinity. The Bible teaches that there is only one God, and one person who is God, and that is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The holy Spirit is the Spirit of God himself.

*hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3).*

In verse 2 we read that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In other words, God's Spirit was in action, moving intensely, and with purpose over the cosmos. God was about to begin the great work of bringing life and order and form to His creation. The Hebrew word for "Spirit" in the Old Testament is the word ruach. In the New Testament it is pneuma. The root idea running through both of these words is the idea of an invisible but highly effective force. It is a power of force that can be exerted in varying forms and manifested in many ways. We get our English word "pneumatics" from the Greek word pneuma. Pneumatics has to do with operating something mechanically by the force and power of air. Air is invisible, but it can be a force with incredible power! The manager of a granite quarry in North Carolina was quoted as saying, "We supplied all the granite for the municipal building in New York City. We can lift an acre of solid granite, 10 feet thick, to almost any height we desire for the purpose of moving it... We can do it as easily as I can lift this piece of paper."<sup>2</sup>

How did they do it? Pneumatically, with air! If you contain air in hoses and put enough pressure behind it, it will drive a hammer through concrete, stop a train pulling over one hundred cars, or move an acre of solid granite, 10 feet thick, anywhere you want! In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God moved over the cosmos, and when God said, "Let there be light", there was light. That's powerful!

The Spirit of God is the very essence of God. It is His very life, His character and power. It is His life force in manifestation and action. Thus from the first use of Spirit the testimony of the Scriptures is that it is God's invisible, divine power manifesting itself. In Genesis it brought order and life to creation. Lets look at two other similar sections of Scripture, one from Job and the other from the book of Psalms.

*By His Spirit He adorned the heavens...(Job 26:3)*

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<sup>2</sup> Billy Graham, The Holy Spirit, Word Books, Waco, Texas, pg. 24

*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. (Psalm 33:6)*

The word “breath” in Psalm 33, and the word “Spirit” in Job 26, are both translated from the Hebrew word ruach. By the Spirit of God, by His invisible divine power, all the galaxies in the universe were set in their place! And what God has done in the universe, He desires to do by His Spirit for every man and women today. God, by His mighty Spirit desires to bring order and life and fruitfulness to our lives.

The Spirit of God is the very life force of God. It is all that He is. And though we cannot see this Spirit, we can see its power and influence. We can see its manifestation. For example in Genesis we read that the Spirit of God made Joseph wise to discern Pharaoh’s dream.

*And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. (Genesis 41:38, 39).*

In Exodus 31, God’s Spirit gave a craftsman by the name of Bezaleel great artistic skills for the building of the Tabernacle.

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying; “See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. (Exodus 31:1-3)*

In the book of Judges, God’s Spirit gave the leaders of God’s people power and strength, and wisdom.

*When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel...the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel. (Judges 3:9, 10)*

*And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him [Samson], and he tore the lion apart...(Judges 14:6)*

God’s Spirit also inspired His prophets to speak for Him.

*But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgressions and to Israel his sin. (Micah 3:8)*

These are just a few examples of how God’s holy Spirit was understood and how it was manifested in the Old Testament. But it is when we come to the New Testament, that we gain a clearer understanding of what the holy Spirit is. Let’s begin in Luke with a record concerning the conception of Jesus Christ.

*Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born, will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:30-35)*

In this account the angel tells Mary that she will bear the Son of God. And then he tells her the means of conception: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.” We have here a vital piece of information about the nature of the holy Spirit. The two terms “Holy Spirit” and “power of the Highest” do not refer to two different things, but to one and the same thing: God’s power in action. The phrase “power of the Highest” defines the term “Holy Spirit. Simply stated, Christ was conceived by the power of God and, as the Gospels show, all that he did in his ministry he also did by the power of God’s Spirit (Acts 10:38).

The truth is, that in the gift of the holy Spirit believers have power from on high. In the gift of the Spirit, God’s empowering presence is in us giving us vast resources to live all of life with godliness and

spiritual victory. The holy Spirit is not simply a nice little sidelight to the Christian faith. It is at the heart and soul of what it means to be born again. This gift is what marks us off as God's special people, distinct from the rest of humanity (Romans 8:8, 9, 15, 16).

It is through the Spirit of God that the love of God floods our hearts (Romans 5:5). The Spirit of God gives us new abilities (1 Corinthians 12:4-11), and a new sense of security as to our salvation (Ephesians 1:13, 14). The gift of the Spirit is our "Helper" enabling us to be all that God has called us to be, and to do all that he has called us to do. The holy Spirit is God dwelling in His people, in fulfillment of His promise:

*"And I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (1 Corinthians 6:16 quoted from Leviticus 26:12; Ezekiel 37:27)*

Throughout the rest of this book we will be exploring what the Word of God says about the gift of the Spirit. And we will discover how to utilize this gift in the best possible way, for the blessing of our lives and for the glory of God.

[This article is adapted from Chuck LaMattina's forthcoming book *The Power of the Holy Spirit*. The book may be ordered from Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL. 60645]

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In speaking now of God as Spirit we are not referring to an impersonal influence, an energy transmitted by God but distinct from himself. Nor are we indicating a divine entity or hypostasis which is a third person of the Godhead. We are speaking of God himself, his personal presence, as active and related [Geoffrey Lampe, late professor of Divinity in Cambridge University, *God as Spirit*, p. 208, SCM Press]

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## Written in Our Hearts

by Steve Santini

Westfield, Massachusetts

As Christian believers we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. When the holy spirit convinced us of our need we called out to the Lord Jesus Christ and we believed that God had raised him from the dead. At that moment we were changed forever - all things became new. As Paul

said, we were "regenerated" and, as John and Peter said, we were "born again." Our hearts were set free to live this new life in Christ - having been born of the Father before the foundation of the world.

Can we take of the residue of the old knowledge of good and evil to live this new life? The written word provides the answer. Although the Galatians had begun by the spirit they were turned in their minds to this slain nature and corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Their minds were diverted to believe that of their own selves they could form systems to attain Christ. These systems or programs became the standards by which they judged themselves. They ended up biting and devouring each other. The cross of Christ became of no effect and Christ was not being formed in them.

Jesus said, "New wine must be put in new wineskins." How then are our mental faculties made new? Through the holy spirit Peter provides one cord of truth when he says, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit ..." (1 Pet. 1:22 KJV).

In Paul's epistles many cords of this truth are woven together. In Romans 12:2 he uses the passive voice for the verb "transformed" to indicate that the action of transforming is taken upon the subject "ye". In Ephesians 4:23, a pivotal verse between the old nature and the new, he uses the dative case of the noun in the phrase "in the spirit". Without the given preposition in the text the phrase is better understood to mean "by the spirit." Thus the soul, of which the mind is a part, is purified by submissively hearing the truth through the spirit. Hereby, we "work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).

Throughout the written word patterns of truth are interwoven to display the all truth of the living tapestry of the sufferings and glories of Christ. One central pattern is the holy spirit's functional relationship with Christ. Jesus Christ promised that the comforter or holy spirit would come to testify of him (15:26). The comforter would receive of Christ and show it unto Jesus' followers thereby glorifying Christ. He would not speak of himself but only of Christ (John 16:13-15).

With the coming of Jesus Christ the work of the holy spirit become vivid. It was the work of the

holy spirit that brought forth Jesus Christ in the womb of Mary. It was by the holy spirit that Elizabeth confirmed that it was the Lord's Christ in Mary's womb. It was the holy spirit that revealed to Simeon that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. It was the holy spirit that descended on Jesus as a dove when he was baptized of John that revealed whom he was. It was the holy spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness to face the devil's temptations, his final test as to whom he was. And, it was the holy spirit upon Jesus "without measure" that made him known.

It was important to Jesus that his followers know whom he was. He asked them shortly before he went to Jerusalem to be crucified whom they said he was. Peter responded correctly when he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Likewise, Jesus made it clear that this had been revealed to Peter by the spirit and that it was upon "this rock" that the church was to be built (Matt. 16:16-18).

As Jesus finished the last supper and walked with his apostles and disciples to the place where he would be taken for crucifixion, he spoke the foundational truths of the coming mystery of godliness. He told them to believe he was in the Father and the Father was in him. And he asked that if they couldn't believe on his words to believe for his works' sake. Moments later as he walked forward he said that he, who was in the Father, was to be in them and that they would know it on the day he lived (John 14:19-20).

During this time with them, Jesus also taught them on five occasions either the purpose or the character of the holy spirit who was to dwell in them. The holy spirit was to guide them into all truth, to teach them all things, to testify of Jesus Christ, to reprove and to be "the spirit of truth" or "the comforter." In short, the holy spirit was *with* them and would be *in* them.

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus Christ ministered the gift of the holy spirit from the Father. Through the holy spirit the twelve apostles were taught, empowered and set apart to proclaim Jesus Christ, the foundation stone of Israel. Years later Stephen, at the end of his declaration to the leaders of Israel, proclaimed, "ye do always resist the Holy Ghost ... " He was subsequently stoned to death. Here the Father's exclusive calling for Israel to

become a nation of priests was summarily rejected. As the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen were laid at the feet of one Saul of Tarsus the Father's building program began its expansion from the foundation stone of Jesus Christ laid in Israel.

It was given to Paul as a wise masterbuilder to take this foundation of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected in Israel and build upon it with height, depth, breadth and length. Paul showed that the church was raised through the heavens into its position in the ascended Christ where each member is crucified, resurrected and seated together in him. This consummate, inclusive plan without boundary or separation - where all are one in Christ - is the mystery hid in God from before the foundations of the world. Thus, the best wine is saved for last.

The holy spirit is guiding us day by day into this all truth of Christ's habitation. Now from faith to faith, from patterns of things seen to the unseen of the heavenlies, we move from our faith in him to his faith in us. In him, who is in the Father, we have our life, being and movement. The holy spirit is receiving of him and is writing on our hearts the life of Christ within. In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and through the holy spirit he shares that part of himself that is needed to individual souls. In this manner our humble hearts grow together in the knowledge and understanding of ourselves in Christ and Christ in us. In this way Christ is formed in our souls and he is ever living through the new creation of his body.

[Steve Santini publishes his own newsletter *Ekklesia* in Westfield, MA]

## Speaking in Tongues: Manifesting the Spirit of God

By Scot Hahn

Cary, North Carolina

I am one among the many growing number of Christian believers who practices the Spirit inspired manifestation of speaking in tongues. For my life speaking in tongues is a wonderful blessing and a precious gift. Though speaking in tongues has suffered a great deal of criticism from both scholars as well as the church at large, this is really no wonder. Anything (especially a spiritual phenomenon) which begins to raise eyebrows tends to draw a quick and terminating blow from those who wish that things be left the way they are. God however has been the instigating force from the beginning of the Christian church in inspiring this great gift and the same is true today.

It is my conviction that the Bible has plenty to say in favor of this manifestation of God's Spirit. And, I also would go so far as to say that the Bible has nothing at all demeaning to say about speaking in tongues - as long as it is done in a "fitting and orderly way". Speaking in tongues is a gift from God and should not only be allowed but expected where there are believers.

Unfortunately, misconceptions about speaking in tongues abound. Many people have learned what they know about speaking in tongues from the charismatic and sometimes frenzied Pentecostal type churches in which this manifestation of the Spirit has come to light. Based on some of the stories that I have heard and read as well as experiences I have had in certain of these churches I can sympathize with those who would rather this gift be left a mystery. Speaking in tongues has traditionally been associated with churches that also carry out such unbiblical practices as being slain in the spirit, snake handling, uncontrollable laughing and shouting as well as other "strange" happenings. It is not my concern, however, to speak about the misconceptions but rather to examine some of what the Bible itself has to say about this gift and hopefully in the process make clear the fallacy of some of these misunderstandings.

## Speaking in Tongues in Acts

The book of Acts contains three records (Acts 2:4, 10:44-46, 19:5-6) in which Christian believers spoke in tongues. By reading over these records in context and drawing out a few points we can get some good ideas of what speaking in tongues meant for the first century believers. In Acts chapter 2 we find a group of believers including the twelve apostles gathered in celebration of the Feast of Pentecost. Not long before this Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead. What was probably most fresh in their minds was his instructions to them after he had been raised from the dead about what to do once he was "taken up to heaven". Acts 1:4 records some instructions he gave them at this time, "On one occasion while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" It is in Acts 2 that we find this promise fulfilled.

*When the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*

*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'" (Acts 2:1-12)*

Then Peter gives the explanation,



*This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...'*

So here where we find the first record of believers speaking in tongues it is clearly understood to be evidence that the promised holy Spirit has been given to the believers in Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus had received God's Spirit and the reason the people around them knew it was because they were speaking in tongues. Something else which is important to note is that the crowd that came together in bewilderment described this speaking in tongues as "declaring the wonders of God".

The next time we run across speaking in tongues explicitly being mentioned in the Book of Acts is when Peter is visiting the centurion Cornelius. Peter, in opposition to the Jewish regulations of his time, goes to visit this gentile family in response to a vision he has received. In verse 42 of chapter 10 Peter is in the middle of laying out the "good news of peace through Jesus Christ":

*'He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'*

*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:42-46).*

Here again we find speaking in tongues as the evidence of people receiving the holy Spirit. Later as Peter is reporting to the brothers back in Jerusalem he explains what happened at Cornelius' house like this:

*As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized without the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I*

*to think that I could oppose God? (Acts 11:15-18).*

Again it was by the speaking in tongues that Peter and the other circumcised believers knew that the gentiles had been accepted by God and given His Spirit.

Acts 19:1-7 is the last time in Acts that speaking in tongues is recorded. Paul is coming into Ephesus and he runs across some disciples,

*and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'*

*They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'*

*So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?'*

*'John's baptism,' they replied.*

*Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all."*

Here again the believers speak in tongues when they receive the holy Spirit. In all three of the examples in Acts when people speak in tongues it is the evidence that they have received the holy Spirit and are accepted by God.

### Speaking in Tongues in I Corinthians

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains a great deal of information about speaking in tongues. However, we need a little background information on the church in Corinth before we can understand some of the things Paul has to say about speaking in tongues in chapters 12-14. In these chapters Paul is probably addressing some abuses in regards to speaking in tongues as well as other abuses which caused confusion and disorder in the Corinthian church. His greatest concern for the believers in Corinth is that when they come together they be edified,

*Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church (14:12).*

Paul stresses the importance of diversity within the local group of believers which is the body of Christ in that region:

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many (12:14).*

*God has arranged the (different) parts in the body just as he wanted them to be (12:18).*

*(the different) ... parts should have equal concern for each other (12:25).*

He also explains that the only way in which the church will be edified and the different members of the body will contribute to the well being of the whole is if they exercise their spiritual gifts in love (Ch. 13). Now that we have seen some of the goals Paul has in addressing the Corinthian church we will be better able to understand some of his comments to them about speaking in tongues.

To begin with, in chapter 12 Paul lists speaking in tongues as a manifestation or evidence of the Spirit in one's life. This is in complete agreement with what we learn from the Book of Acts, but Paul has more to say about the matter.

*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified (14:1-5).*

*Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts try to excel in gifts that build up the church. For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is*

*unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving. You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.*

*I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (14:12-19).*

In all of these verses Paul is speaking about what should go on as they gather for fellowship. Paul is not concerned that there are those that speak in tongues. In fact, Paul desires that *all* of them speak in tongues (vs. 5) because he himself knows what a great blessing it is (vs. 4, 18). What Paul is saying is that speaking in tongues in the gathered assembly without an interpretation of what you are saying to God is not useful for building the others up that are present because they cannot tell what the speaker is saying. This is his main concern in this section. He ends by encouraging them

*... do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything must be done in a fitting and orderly way (vs. 39-40).*

It is obvious throughout I Corinthians that those who speak in tongues are in total control of this manifestation of the Spirit. They can speak in tongues at will and they can refrain from doing so as well. The Spirit does not "take them over" and force them to do anything. This is precisely why Paul can give them instructions about the proper use of this manifestation. Godly order is not achieved when the church gathers and people speak in tongues without an interpretation of what they are saying. Therefore, unless they interpret what they have spoken in tongues they should remain silent in the church fellowship.

So then, the manifestation of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, is desirable for one's life if it is used properly. This would include the speaker speaking by himself in order to praise God with the Spirit because this brings needed edification to the individual himself. This would also include

speaking in tongues in the gathered assembly if there is an interpretation so that the church may be edified as well.

So, as we have seen from all of these sections of scripture speaking in tongues does not seem to be the exception in the first century church. Instead, speaking in tongues was widespread in the early church and was clearly considered to be evidence of the giving of God's Spirit to his people. Speaking in tongues is also desirable within the parameters of decency and orderliness because it is edifying for the individual who speaks to God with prayer and praise in the Spirit. In summary, for anyone who has not experienced this manifestation of the Spirit the New Testament serves as a guide showing that it is available to those with the Spirit and that it is also a great blessing to their lives. To those who have experienced this gift the New Testament serves as a guide to how it is to be properly manifested both in one's private prayer life as well as within the church fellowship.

[Scot Hahn co-ordinates a home Bible fellowship in Cary, NC and helps edit *The Unity of the Spirit*]

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## Books in Review

### *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*

by Don Snedeker

Almost since the ink dried on the New Testament documents debate has taken place within the Christian church about the exact nature of God. Leaving behind the simple statements of scripture and increasingly turning to Neo-Platonic philosophical concepts the church councils of Nicea (A.D. 325) and Chalcedon (A.D. 451) eventually arrived at a definition of God that is nowhere to be found in scripture. In fact, what came to be called the "orthodox" statement of belief about God was not espoused, or believed, by any of the New Testament writers nor by any of the so-called church fathers of the first three centuries A.D. These facts are openly acknowledged by most scholars. As the renowned Roman Catholic biblical scholar J.A. Fitzmyer states:

The New Testament gives no inkling of the teaching of Chalcedon. That council not only reformulated in other language the New Testament data about Jesus' constitution, but also

reconceptualized it in the light of the current Greek philosophical thinking. And that reconceptualization and reformulation go well beyond the New Testament data [*A Christological Catechism*, p. 102, Paulist Press].

The result of this non-biblical redefinition of God has been confusion ever since. The obvious solution to this problem is to return to the simple and clear statements of scripture itself.

In this light, Don Snedeker's book *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals* is a courageous and massive (422 pages with Index and Bibliography) work that leaves few stones uncovered in helping us to return to the simplicity of the biblical doctrine of "one God, the Father." Though this book exhibits a good deal of originality, its main strength is found in drawing on the expertise of the many biblical scholars, particularly in the 16th - 19th centuries, who sought in their writings to re-establish the truth of the oneness of God in the faith of God's people. Snedeker's organization of this material and his quotes from the writings of these earlier scholars are superb.

Anyone who is looking for a book that details the biblical and logical arguments for holding to the simple biblical concept that "God is one" will find a treasure house of information here. But let it be said clearly that *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals* is not a book for light bedtime reading. It is a scholarly book that demands the same honest and serious attention from the reader that was so obviously put into it by its author. Certainly, most any thoughtful believer would benefit greatly from having this book in his own personal library for reference and study.

In short, this book is highly recommended. It may be ordered from: International Scholar's Publications, 7831 Woodmont Ave. #345 Bethesda MD 20814. It may also be ordered by credit card by calling 1-800-55-publish.

## Living Letters

### Response to "Why House Church?"

Mark Mattison's article, "Why House Church" (Winter 1998) was a very interesting and thought provoking article. It is evident that his desire for the home church movement stems from his desire to glorify God and bring good to His people. But I have some concerns regarding the thrust of the article that the house church movement is the "key" to church renewal today. First of all, I am not opposed to Christians meeting in homes for learning, worship and fellowship. We should get together as often as possible (Hebrews 10: 25) and *wherever* possible. But I do not think that the house church is the "key" to church renewal.

Many times people are disappointed with the house church principle because it ignores our modern day cultural problems. Lifestyle demands placed on families soon make it a burden to continually have a home available for church meetings, especially when all ages are involved (babies, children, teens and adults). My own fellowship, Grace Ministry, began as a house church, in my house! At first everything moved along smoothly, until we started to grow. Children made it necessary to have a nursery, and a place for "children's church" or "fellowship" where they could learn God's Word. Soon, on Sundays every room in my house was used and there was a need for even more rooms. We could have split into smaller house churches, but it became evident to us that this would not meet "our needs." Though the home based church worked well for single people and married couples without children, as soon as children arrived the picture changed. Adults also enjoyed the larger gathering of believers, the types of teachings offered, and the special benefits of corporate singing and ministering in a larger fellowship.

Though I understand Mark's intentions when he says that the house church is key to Christian renewal, this is not what the Bible actually says. Titus 3:5 says that renewal starts when we are born again of God's Spirit. Then we are continually renewed as we yield ourselves to God, putting His Word into our hearts and minds (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10). Obviously, this can and does happen anywhere. It can happen in a small group

meeting in a home, or in a larger meeting of believers.

When attempting to formulate a pattern for *where* and *how* the church should meet, its important to remember what the Scriptures say about essential Christian experiences. *Function* often determines the forms we choose, and it should not be the other way around. Acts 2:42-47 gives us a good illustration. The first essential experience for the early Christians was that "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42)." The first essential was the intake of biblical truth. There are many Greek words used for teaching, preaching and sharing God's Word. The most common word for "teaching" is *didasko*. Interestingly, in the book of Acts the word is used about half the time for instruction to non-believers and the other half to believers. Teaching, proclaiming biblical truth is important, but there are no stereotype patterns for teaching. Reading through the Bible one sees that the methods of Jesus, and the apostles, and other believers varied according to the situation. Sometimes teachings were in large groups, sometimes in small ones. Sometimes it was done by one person, sometimes by two or more. At times the presentation was lengthy, at other times short. At times the teachings happened spontaneously, sometimes they were planned. At times teachings were basically lectures, at times it involved interaction.

The other vital experiences of Acts 2:42ff were more *relational*: fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, gracious giving and witnessing. No where does the Bible say that the house church is the key to success in these areas. That these things happen is essential, but how and where depends on need and circumstances.

Currently Grace Ministry functions with what I call Acts 20:20 insight. We all meet together on Sunday for what would be called a "traditional" Sunday service, but we also meet in small groups during the week. We have a small fellowship for marriage enrichment, one for Bible study, and one for prayer. Others are developed or discarded as needs arise. What is important is that we gather together in whatever way seems appropriate at the time, to help and encourage one another in Christ. Certainly, if there is a "key" to renewal it is *biblical experiences*, not so much *where* they happen.

Chuck LaMattina

## Notes & Quotes on the Bible

### One God, the Father

True Christian unity can only be properly built upon the simplest and most profound of all biblical truths: "one God, the Father." All other Christian truths are ultimately derived from this truth. In essence, Christian unity is formed by becoming a part of God family through believing in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and then receiving the gift of God's own Spirit. It is for this reason that true Christian unity is called in Ephesians "the unity of the Spirit." This is a unity that is created by God himself - through his Son and through his Spirit - so that God then "lives" or "dwells" as a Father within his people. Paul states this clearly:

*For through him (Christ) we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:18-22).*

It is through the gift of God's own Spirit that believers have direct "access" to God as their personal Father and that God "lives" in his people. The key to all of this, of course, is that God himself is Spirit and that those who receive his Spirit are part of his family. Rather than seeking unity in post-biblical creeds we should recognize that for Christians spiritual unity *already* exists and it is this which we are exhorted to "keep". For the earliest Christians practical unity proceeded from the truth that they were *already* a part of God's family. As believers in Christ they had received God's Spirit and were thus able to exclaim, "Abba, Father."

With this truth as their foundation the first century believers could then proceed to work

outwards to build unity within God's family on a practical basis. Always though, it was the truth that they had *already* received the "firstfruits of the Spirit" - with the final harvest of their inheritance still to come - that was the basis of their existence as God's family. Thus, practical unity proceeded from spiritual reality, as Paul wrote:

*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph. 4:3-6).*

In sum, Christian unity is built on God the Father's plan and corresponding action to bring about a family of children through the redemptive work of his Son. This becomes effective as a spiritual reality for believers in Christ through the gift of God's Spirit. In this way, all of God's children become "one in Christ" and can proceed from this foundation to bring about the practical unity of God's family in everyday life. The goal in this practical unity is to be "imitators of God as dear children" (Eph. 5:2) and thus to show forth his nature and character to the world.

### The God of the Bible: His Nature and Character

When the Bible speaks of the nature<sup>1</sup> and character of God it always does so in simple and clear terms, without philosophical language. God is presented throughout the Bible as the creator, sustainer and ruler of the universe. He is the almighty God for whom nothing is too difficult. In addition, God is said to be "love," "light" and "spirit." All of these being simple descriptions of a God who is both transcendent and personal. In short, he is a God of power, love, and holiness who constantly desires the best for his people. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* summarizes God's nature and character for us:

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<sup>1</sup>It may very well be that to use the word "nature" in describing God's "being" is misleading. I'm not at all sure that the biblical writers would have been happy with the use of such a term about God. The word "nature" is used in this article for lack of a better alternative - or, for lack of precise understanding on my own part.

The OT contains no all-embracing definition of the concept of God. On the other hand, it makes an extensive range of statements which testify to the being of God and have their basis in the divine revelation. Nor is there in the OT any theogony; it does not go beyond the assertion that God is. He is the first and the last (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), the eternal, the almighty and the living one (Ps. 36:10), the creator of the heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1; 2:4, etc.), the Lord, who guides the destinies of the nations, but who has made Israel a people for his own possession (Exod. 19:5f.). Israel, stands, therefore, under his special protection. Yahweh not only leads, guides and gives Israel his promises; he also imposes his judgments when he [Israel] goes his own way. God is the commanding and demanding God who makes his will known and demands obedience. The history of Israel is the history of God with this people. Thus Israel's belief in God is founded on a theology of history.

It expresses a conception of God as personal, that is capable of all the emotions that a person can have: love, anger, repentance and other emotions. But even if human characteristics can be attributed to him, he cannot be compared with any human being (Hos. 11:9). The transcendent God who dwells in light, where no one can approach, is exalted above time and space and is therefore unique in his Godhead, not to be portrayed or localized (Ex. 20:4). He is the eternal king (Isa. 52:7) who rules over all the kingdoms of the world (Isa. 37:16).

The most fundamental feature of God's being is expressed by the word "holy". In the OT this has become the characteristic attribute of God. He is the Holy One (Isa. 40:25; Hab. 3:3; Hos. 11:9). But the holy, transcendent God steps out of his concealment through his word and his acts of revelation, and repeatedly communicates with his people in demonstrations of power and glory.

The holy God is just in all that he does (cf. Ps. 7:11). He is the judge who condemns unrighteousness and to whom man has to answer. But the OT testifies to his grace and mercy (e.g. Ex. 34:6; Ps. 103:8). He comforts the pious (Job 15:11), blesses him and helps him in his need (Pss. 45:7; 90:1; 94:22). Through the personal relationship between God and his people there is created an I-Thou relation between God and the individual believer who can turn to him in prayer in all his needs.

God in the OT is also called Father; he is the father of the people of Israel (Ex. 4:22f.; Deut.

32:6; Isa. 63:16; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1). However, a full knowledge of the divine grace and love which embraces the whole world is only arrived at through the revelation of the new covenant. Nevertheless, the OT testifies to the fact that God forgives transgressions and sins (Ex. 34:6f.). He has mercy on his people in everlasting grace (Isa. 54:8), and in particular takes up the cause of the poor and needy, and widows and orphans (Isa. 49:13; Ps. 146:9). Therefore, even in the OT God is not just a dreaded enemy of man in his unholiness; he also makes it possible for him to trust and love, because he himself loves his chosen people.

The NT rests firmly on the foundation of the OT, when it speaks about God, but its emphases are new. He is the God who is near, the Father of Jesus Christ, who justifies freely by his grace. His action in election bursts all claims to exclusiveness. But it is the same God who reveals himself here as in the OT, and whose plan of salvation, there promised, comes to fulfillment here [Vol. 2, pp. 70-73]

This biblical understanding of God contrasts sharply with the pagan religions of biblical times and with ancient Greek philosophical notions about God. It is useful to note the contrasts so that we are aware of that which is not "of God." Again, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* summarizes the ancient Greek development of the concept of "god" - a concept that was to have enormous influence on the post-biblical Christian understanding of God and comes to us today most vividly in the popular New Age movement:

Greek religion was polytheistic. The gods were represented in anthropomorphic form as personal beings who exercised a determining influence on the world and fate of men, but who themselves were dependent on a superior fate. As they were not creator-gods, they were not thought of as outside the universe and transcendent. The cosmos included both gods and men. The influence of the gods was not universal, but was limited by their natures and attributes. They were not righteous in the OT sense. The Greek gods had form. Consequently, the statement "God is spirit" (John 4:24) could not be applied to them. From Aeschylus onwards the different gods came increasingly to be identified. Their convergence into one divine being was prepared by the pre-Socratic thinkers and the ideas of classical tragedy.

The Greek philosophical understanding of god was non-personal. Philosophers sought the origin of all things and the principle that shaped the world. In the process of rationalizing and moralizing an important transformation of the Greek concept of god took place. The divine forms were spiritualized and finally replaced by general concepts like "world reason," "the divine," and "being," which influenced and formed the world as powers giving it meaning and creating order. In Hellenistic syncretism the various Greek and non-Greek divinities were assimilated and even equated as a result of the recognition that behind the diverse names stood the same entities. This is particularly clear in the Isis cult. Not infrequently these tendencies lead to the honoring of one godhead as the divine All. The development reached its height in Neo-Platonism, where the divine is the universal One which has no objective existence or personality. It is being itself which is manifest through a series of hypostases and emanations in the world, since it is the ground and force behind everything that is [Vo. 2, p. 66-67].

It is not difficult to see how these Greek philosophical notions influenced the post-biblical councils of Nicea (A.D. 325) and Chalcedon (A.D. 451) in their debates about the nature of God. Nor is it difficult to see the roots of the present day New Age movement, along with similar movements throughout history, in these notions.

In short, the contrast between the God of the Bible with these Greek conceptions of god (s) could hardly be sharper. The God of the Bible is not an all encompassing "principle" or "divine All". Nor does he exist as different *hypostases* ("persons"). Instead, the Bible insists that God is a single living being - or "person" - who is the creator of the world, the Lord of the world and the personal Father of his children. As such he is at work in history and is guiding history to his own appointed goals. These goals most definitely include a "oneness" for the world, but because of the sin and evil of this age it is a oneness that can only be achieved in Christ. In short, God's goal is to "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:10).

### **God, the Father, is Spirit**

One of the simplest statements about God's nature and character is found in the New Testament

in John 4:23-24 and it should be emphasized because it shows God to be both "spirit" and a personal "Father" to his people:

*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

Rather than simply being a metaphysical statement about God, this statement is made in relationship to God's desire to be a Father who can fellowship with his people in an intimate way - "in spirit and in truth." Thus, God is shown not only to be spirit in nature, but also to be a personal God who, through the impartation of his own Spirit, can have an intimate relationship with his people. However, since God is "spirit" he is also invisible. Thus, he must manifest or reveal himself to his people in some way if he is to be understood. Biblically, this is accomplished in several ways.

First, God's "eternal power and deity" can be seen and understood by all people from the natural world of God's creation (Rom 1:19-20; Acts 17:24-28). This should "by nature" lead a person to "seek" God and "find him" for "he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27). In relation to his own people, Israel, God also revealed himself in the OT through his word - both spoken and written - and, through his mightily acts of power on their behalf. In the NT, however, this word, or self-expression, of God reaches its pinnacle when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Jesus Christ, God's unique Son, revealed God's character and nature to the his people - and to the world - in a way so full that he could state, "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In short, Jesus "made known" God his Father to the world more fully than he had ever been known before. As the Gospel of John declares:

*No one has ever seen God; God's only Son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart, has made him known (John 1:18 REB).*

No one has ever seen God, but he who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) made him known. And yet this also is the work of God, for Christ's conception, anointing and ministry were

all accomplished through the power of God's Spirit. As Acts states,

*... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38).*

As wonderful as this was God did not stop with Christ's ministry for it has always been his goal to bring into existence a family of children who would manifest his character to the world and who could worship him "truthfully by the Spirit of God" (Phil. 3:3). Through his death and resurrection Jesus is the "firstborn among many brothers," thus opening the way for a new humanity - a family of God's children - "conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). Thus, that same character and nature of God - which are revealed most fully in God's unique Son, Jesus Christ - are now revealed in all of God's children through his Spirit. As I John states:

*No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God (I John 4:12-115).*

This is the "unity of the Spirit" which the New Testament proclaims. In short, the one God of the Bible, the creator of the heavens and the earth, is now our personal Father. He has manifested himself to the world through his Son, Jesus Christ, and now manifests himself to the world through us by way of his Spirit. In this way God our Father has brought into being a "unity of the Spirit" which magnifies his own nature and character to the world. As Jesus prayed,

*I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23)*

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