
The Unity of the Spirit

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Dear Fellow-believers,

Recently in my personal and group study of the Bible I have been continually reminded of the importance of understanding God's work in Christ. As we gain insight into the work of God through the New Testament writings we come to understand God's ultimate purposes for man, spiritual principalities and powers as well as creation itself - all of which are bound up in Christ. Exposure to such marvelous knowledge, through the Scriptures, helps us to better understand our privileged position of being God's chosen people in Christ.

It is God's will that by understanding His work in Christ we will be better equipped to fulfill our role as believers in God's great plan. Ephesians sums up well the purposes of God.

He (God) has made known to us his secret purpose in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in Christ, to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, everything in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10 NEB).

Here the fulfillment of God's plan for the entire universe is said to be taking place in Christ. It is obvious that this plan is yet to be fully realized, for no one can deny that all things in heaven and on earth are not unified. But God has already acted in Christ to ensure that this unity will be accomplished.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col. 1:19-20 NIV).

There are different dimensions within this reconciling process. Enmity abounds within God's creation on many different levels. Mankind, in addition to being alienated from God (Col. 1:21), is divided against itself. There are hostile forces within the heavenlies that must be brought to subjection before unity can be achieved.

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:11-12 NIV)

Atop all this the creation itself "groans as in the pains of childbirth" waiting to be "liberated from its bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:19-22). God's work in Christ is sufficient to deal effectively with all these problems. We ourselves as God's chosen people in Christ have an important role to play in the outworking of this plan.

In dealing with man God's work had to change the position in which we stood towards Himself and one another. He did this in Christ. God's message to the world is that

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against

them... 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. 5:19-21 NIV).

And if we have been reconciled or brought to God then it stands true that there should no longer be divisions among mankind.

For he (Christ) himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph. 2:14-18 NIV).

Although this section speaks specifically to the division of Jew and Gentile which was of utmost importance for biblical times it is also true for all men everywhere. For

here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Col. 3:11 NIV).

As men who have been brought to the side of God where "Christ is all and is in all" there is no longer any room for divisions instead the way to unity has been revealed.

Though there is probably a great deal that man does not know about spiritual powers, we do know that their function does not lay outside of God's purposes in Christ. It is "all things in heaven and on earth" that will be brought into a unity in Christ. God has

seated him (Christ) at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything

for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph. 1:20-23 NIV).

God has also given Christ's church a mediatory role to play in displaying his wisdom to these heavenly powers.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11 NIV).

The eternal purpose of unifying all things can be seen as already accomplished in part within the church. This unity is the design for all of God's creation and when the "rulers in the heavenlies" look upon the unified people of God in Christ, God's wisdom in accomplishing unity is revealed to them.

God's design for creation is not separate from His design for man. As Paul stated,

In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed ... that the creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God (Rom. 8:18-21 NJB)

When God's goal for man is reached and His children in Christ are "revealed" the creation itself will be freed from corruption and will be made fitting for the scene of God's rule. What a glorious day that will be! May we as God's children "wait for it patiently" (Rom. 8:25) with steadfast hope and faith as we serve in holiness and love (Gal. 5:5-6).

Scot Hahn

BE YE HOLY, BECAUSE I AM HOLY

by Marilee LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

As Christians, we have within us, the inherent, dynamic potential to greatly affect the world. But unfortunately, all too often, one can barely tell the Christian from the unbeliever. In the movies and television we watch, the books we read, in our daily interactions with those we work with, our attitudes, speech and lifestyle are indistinguishable from the unbeliever.

That's not God's plan or desire for His church. Only as we remain set apart from the world, only as we think, speak and behave in a manner drastically different from the world around us, can we have a powerful, spiritual impact on the lives of our neighbors, family, friends and coworkers.

For the Church to really affect the world, we must remember:

WHO we are: redeemed sons of God.

WHAT we have: God's spirit in us.

WHERE we reside: in the heavenlies.

The Bible calls this being "set apart" or "sanctified". The Greek word used is *hagios*, and it is translated as holy, sanctified, pure, chaste, clean and saints.

God commanded Israel to separate themselves from the unbelieving nations that surrounded them. They were not to marry the unbelievers lest they turn from the true God and worship strange idols.

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God: the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the people on the face of the earth.

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples: but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; all scripture verses are from the NKJV).

God tells them that His motivation for these instructions is His love for them. He had chosen

them, they were His "special treasure." Ephesians tells us that God also,

chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph. 1:4).

With the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were made "holy." Paul's letter to the Colossians also emphasizes this truth:

And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight (Colossians 1:21-22).

At one time we were unbelievers, outside the covenant with Israel. But now we are no longer "strangers and foreigners" but,

a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

A dwelling place of God! Yet if our lives and actions do not reflect God's glory in all that we do, the world will see no difference between us and the pagans which surround us. The Bible clearly outlines for us what our behavior should be now that we are "sanctified ones" or "saints."

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Colossians 3:12-17).

The Word is to dwell in us richly, an overabundance of God's Word flooding our thoughts daily. This means reading our Bibles daily, and diligently memorizing scripture verses. If our sword of the spirit is the Word of God as Ephesians 6:17 tells us, we must have our weapons sharpened and ready for the daily spiritual battle.

Spending time daily reading God's Word is not a luxury, something to do if we have the time. It is essential to a believer's walk as a sanctified Christian. In John 17, Jesus Christ is pouring his heart out to his Father. In this prayer Jesus clearly instructs us on how to keep our lives and hearts set apart, ready to serve our God:

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word (John 17:16-20).

In order to fulfill Jesus' prayer for us, that others will come to Christ by our words and witness, we must daily spend time reading our Bibles because God's Word is what sanctifies our hearts (John 17:17). We must memorize it, meditate upon it and then, most importantly, DO IT!

For most of us, it's not the earth-shattering, dramatic situations that pressure us; it's the small, daily irritations that grind us down - the bickering of our children that causes us to lose patience; the gossip at work that causes us to speak hurtful words; the rush hour traffic that turns our thoughts to extracting painful revenge on the driver in front of us. When we find ourselves in one of these situations, we can succumb to temptation or we can use one of the weapons in our spiritual arsenal. If we've previously memorized Ephesians 4:31,32, for example, the next time we're about to open our mouths to dish up the latest scandal we've heard about, we can instead think:

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:31,32).

The powerful words of scripture, retained in our thoughts, then acted upon, can change those gossiping, hurtful words into words of encouragement and blessing. The renewed mind is a mind filled to overflowing with the truths of God's Word. It is essential to walking a holy life. Romans 12:1,2 tells us to offer all of our very lives as a living sacrifice.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

We are to offer up all that we do as an act of service and worship to God. The emphasis here is on service; we sacrifice our lives to God so that we may do God's will, not our own. The whole purpose of setting ourselves apart, cleansing ourselves from wickedness, is to be "useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

When we try to keep one foot in the world and one foot in the Word, we lose all our effectiveness. We can't exercise dual citizenship. If we simply blend in with the worldly attitudes around us we lose all our impact for good. But as we spend lots of time with God's written Word, continually feeding our minds with Scripture, then as we speak and act accordingly, we'll be setting ourselves apart from the ways of the world. When we let the light of God's love shine through our lives, the world cannot help but notice. Let's continue in John 17 with the next three verses:

... that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one is Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:21-23).

As we sanctify ourselves by the Word there are great results. First, we become one with God and Christ (v. 21); secondly, the world believes that God sent Christ (v. 21); and finally, the world knows that God loves us as He loved Christ (v. 23).

We will one day be "as He is" (1 John 3:1-3). But why not show this love and power to the world now? We are already God's children and we are called to walk, set apart from the ways of this present evil age. Our nature is holy, our destiny is eternity.

Paul's letter to Titus puts the holy life of the believer in perspective for us:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14).

May we walk daily as God's chosen, sanctified, holy ones - blameless at Christ's coming.

[Marilee LaMattina lives in Chicago, Illinois, where she homeschools her three children and helps her husband Chuck in *Grace Ministry USA*]

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The Lifestyle of "the Saints" - "God's Holy People" (NIV)

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Eph. 5:3-4 NIV).

The Unity of the Spirit

"Good Sex"

by Tracy Savage

St. Petersburg, Russia

Today premarital sex is not only looked at as the expected norm but living together in a non-marital sexual relationship is just as acceptable. I personally don't like the word "pre-marital" because this implies that there will be an "aftermarital" relationship, which I would say doesn't always, or even often, happen. It is better to just say "sex outside the marriage commitment."

Looking through the pages of scripture, and at our sick world, it is obvious that sexual impurity is one, if not the main, cause of God's heartache and what separates a person from God and keeps him from knowing the grace and love of God. Parents have a responsibility - all too often ignored - to,

"train a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6).

Young people (and all people) have a responsibility to,

"flee from sexual immorality" (I Cor. 6:18).

Certainly it will be easier for a young person to do his part if his parents have done their part - both in teaching and by example.

Television, music, movies, etc. all portray a picture of "love". Unfortunately, this is far from the love God intended between a woman and a man. The "love" the world portrays is better termed as "lust." The godly love God intends between a man and a woman is not only a sexual relationship but a relationship based on commitment and love for God. God gave mankind the sexual relationship as well as, or along with, the marriage relationship. He intended for a sexual relationship to exist only within the marriage bond of two people who are committed to living for God.

Why are there so many problems in our world and in the personal lives of so many people? One of the biggest reasons is because people have disobeyed God and followed after their own sinful desires. Think of how many people are affected by a broken home, sexual diseases, abortions, heartache over a lost "friend" or finding out that one's "friend"

or spouse has cheated on them. God set his rules for sex for our own good. He knows what's best for us. He knows that we need security, which will only come from a commitment. He knows that we need to feel loved, be loved and be cared for.

God also knows that people are sexual beings. He knows that a sexual relationship not only affects the physical part of people, but also the psychological, emotional and spiritual part of a person. He knows everything and therefore since He loves us He has set guidelines for healthy and prosperous living. It hurts Him to see those whom He loves stray from the Way, the Truth and the Life. God has so much love for us and He desires only what is good and perfect for us. He wants us to be happy and healthy.

I have heard it said so many times about men and boys that they CAN'T wait or CAN'T control themselves. They HAVE to have sex. What a bunch of rubbish! With God all things are possible! Unfortunately, more people are not with God than are with Him. Only a weak person can't wait and only a weak and spoiled person HAS to have it. Be strong in the power of His might!

Where are these strong men? Where are the men of God? Reveal yourselves! Stand in truth and on His behalf. Be proud and boast of Christ in you! Self control is a fruit of the Spirit and if God's Spirit dwells in you, you CAN control yourself and you CAN wait. You just have to make a decision and love God more than anything else.

If we acknowledge God as our Father and trust in Him, He will help us in all situations. But there still comes a time when we must make decisions for ourselves. Will we follow God or will we follow the world or our own temporary desires? God gave us a free will. He wants us to love Him and to obey Him because He loves us and that is what is best for us, but he will not force us to obey Him. He has given us all we need for life and godliness, but we need to choose a life of purity. In a moment of passion this decision for godliness may be difficult to make, therefore, decisions need to be made before the temptation comes or one will be less likely to stand up under the temptation and flee from it. There is God's way and there is man's way. Which will you choose? If you truly love God you will obey Him. That is what His Word says.

We all fall short in different ways and God is faithful to forgive us if we ask and if we turn from the sin; but continual sin merely crucifies the Messiah over and over again. Christians should come out from the world and be separate when there is a conflict between God's ways and man's ways. The world is not the measure of what is right and what is wrong. Movies and music do not reveal true love. God has called His children to purity and parents ought to do the same - not because they are "old-fashioned" but because God Himself calls all of us to a pure and godly life. Children should know that this is from God, not just from mom and dad.

God is the authority. He is the Author of life and the rules by which to live. Each time one is tempted to sin, sexually or in any way, he should ask himself if he desires this more than he desires God. Paul words speak straight to all of our hearts:

"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have received from God? YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body" (I Cor. 6:18-20).

[Tracy is a missionary in St. Petersburg, Russia]

Sexual Immorality

The term "sexual immorality" (NIV) or "fornication" (KJV) is the Greek word *porneia* and denotes:

... **any type of illicit sexual activity**. Included in the realm of sexual misconduct in the OT are seduction, rape, sodomy, bestiality, certain forms of incest, prostitution and homosexual relations (cf. Lev. 18; ...). The specific sin of adultery ... was considered more serious than the others so that a special set of laws governed it. **In the NT, almost any form of sexual misconduct (that is, sexual activity outside the marriage relationship) could be designated as fornication** (cf. I Cor. 6:9; 2 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5; I Thess. 4:3; Heb. 13:4). [Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, p. 349].

The Temptations of Jesus Christ

by Leesa Railsback

Peoria, Illinois

The temptations of our Lord Jesus Christ are the central subject of this article and they are recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. But before we turn there, the Book of Hebrews gives us some important insight into the benefit of understanding Christ's temptations for us as believers today:

For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:16-18; all scripture quotations are from the NKJV).

Bullinger's Lexicon defines "tempt" as "to put to the test in order to ascertain the character of anyone." Webster's dictionary defines it as "to entice to something wrong by some specious [superficially fair] argument or inducement." In the gospel accounts, Satan uses plausible arguments and reasoning to test Jesus. By His response to these temptations, the revealed character of our Lord becomes a brilliant example to us of the mind of Christ and gives us the pattern of how we can successfully repel the attacks of our enemy, Satan. We will see how Jesus used specific sections of God's Word to respond to the devil's temptations. A clearer picture emerges of our wonderful Savior, as one we can identify with, one who suffered temptation. Yet, He so trusted the truth of His Heavenly Father's Word that He was able to withstand the onslaught of the devil himself.

The Bible records that the devil directly tempted Jesus in three general areas. The first of these temptations is recorded in Luke.

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for

forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." (Luke 4:1-3)

Jesus was filled with holy spirit at His baptism. At that time a voice came from his heavenly Father in heaven saying,

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

But the first recorded words of the devil to Jesus were, "If you are the Son of God" (Luke 4:1-3). Notice the first thing the devil did was to try and cast doubt on the truth of what God had spoken. The devil had successfully used this tactic against Eve in Genesis 3. Furthermore, in essence the devil was saying here, "Jesus, you haven't eaten in forty days. Obviously God isn't going to take care of your needs. If You're really the Son of God it is OK to do it yourself."

But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." (Luke 4:4)

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3b. But an examination of the context of this section of scripture reveals the great depth of His response.

And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. (Deut. 8:2,3).

Jesus was convinced that just as God provided for the needs of Israel during their forty years in the wilderness, so He would provide for His Son. Jesus didn't just throw out an appropriate "proof text", He quoted a verse from God's Word which carried with it all the implications of God's plan for His chosen people, which was culminating in the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.

Contrast the picture of Jesus alone in the wilderness, urged by the devil, turning stones into bread to feed Himself, with the record in John 6:5-13. This account describes Jesus turning five loaves and two small fish into enough food to fill well over five thousand people with plenty of leftovers! The effect of this miracle is stated in verse 14.

*Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."
(John 6:14)*

God empowered Jesus to minister to a dying world and show Himself as God's promised Messiah, not to use that power for His own personal comfort or gain. The devil had to try a different approach in his attack.

Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,' and 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" (Luke 4:9-11)

The devil very skillfully used a section of scripture which, on the surface, seemed to validate his request of Jesus. After all, according to the devil's version of God's Word God had promised the protection of angels. But read in its entirety, Psalm 91 paints a very different picture of the meaning of these verses. Even the immediate context reveals the error the devil tried to propound.

Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. (Ps. 91:9-12).

Clearly, the prerequisite for God's protection is single-minded devotion to the one true God.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" (Luke 4:12).

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 which says,

You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted Him in Massah.

The name "Massah" literally means "tempted". What happened in Massah that Jesus would respond with this reference?

Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?" And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" And the Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall you strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:1-7).

Was the Lord among them? The people of Israel had seen the plagues in Egypt. They had observed the first Passover, during which God protected their firstborn while the firstborn of the Egyptians died. God guided the Israelites out of Egypt in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They had seen the Red Sea divided, had crossed over on dry land, and saw the Egyptian army destroyed. They had been provided with food in the desert on a daily basis in the form of manna from God. Yet they had said at Massah "Is the Lord among us or not?"

What the devil was really saying to Jesus was, "Is the Lord with you or not?" He disguised it in scripture, but the essence of the temptation to jump off the pinnacle of the temple was to force God into performing a "parlor trick". It would have been quite

an entrance. Jesus, throwing Himself off the pinnacle of the temple, landing safely in full view of the many people who would have been present, announcing Himself as the Messiah. But would such and act glorify God? An account in the book of Acts gives an indication of what the result might have been.

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." (Acts 8:9,10 emphasis mine).

It was the man who got the ultimate glory, not the true God. Compare this account with this record in Luke.

Then it happened, as He [Jesus] was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, "What do you want Me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Then Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God. (Luke 18:35-43 emphasis mine).

Other accounts of miraculous healings which resulted in God receiving glory are recorded in Luke 13:11-13, Luke 17:12-19, and Mark 2:1-12. Genuine miracles always brought deliverance to people and glory to God the Father. The devil tried to convince Jesus that God should be willing to give a sign that Jesus was His Son. Jesus saw right through this tactic and responded with a section of the Word which cut right to the heart of the matter. Obviously, the devil had lost this round.

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give to You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." (Luke 4:5-7)

The devil offered Jesus the authority over the world - its wealth, its power, its people. Adam had delivered this authority to the devil in Genesis, and the devil was offering it to Jesus. But the price was high. Jesus would have to forsake His Father, the one true God, and worship the devil. Adam had done it; but not Jesus.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Luke 4:8).

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13. Again, examination of the context of this verse is revealing.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. So shall it be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant- when you have eaten and are full- then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name (Deut. 6:1-6,10-13).

This section of scripture begins with what Jesus called the first commandment (Mark 12:29-30). Total commitment to God was His first priority. No promise of worldly goods or authority would change that. Jesus affirmed His allegiance to God the Father, the God of promise. Our Savior was no doubt well aware of the prophecies concerning the Messiah given in scripture.

Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust.

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles will bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him (Ps. 72:9-11).

As the Messiah, Jesus knew the time would come when authority over the world would be given to Him by God. But the devil was offering a world that still needed to be reconciled to God. The following verses make this clear.

Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy (Daniel 9:24; cp. Isa. 53).

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:10).

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

The devil tried to get Jesus to take rulership of the world before it was time. Jesus needed to die, as the perfect sacrifice for sin, before He could rule in righteousness. He would not take the shortcut to power by selling out to the devil. Jesus had withstood all the temptations the devil could muster and remained faithful to His Heavenly Father. "Away with you, Satan!", was His reply. The devil had no choice but to leave, and after he had gone, angels came and ministered to Jesus. (Matthew 4:11)

No doubt they attended to all of Jesus' needs, including food and comfort. But was the devil really finished tempting Jesus? The gospel accounts show that these same temptations - presented directly by the devil in the wilderness- resurfaced throughout the ministry of Jesus presented by Satan through the people. The first recorded temptation would also be one of the last. As Jesus was dying on the cross, Satan would use people to cast doubt on His identity and tempt Him to save Himself.

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the king of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing (Matt. 27:39-44).

During His ministry Jesus was also tempted to give flashy "signs" that He was the Messiah. This was regardless of how many Godly miracles He had done.

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing ["testing" = "tempting"] Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven (Matt. 16:1).

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." (Matt. 12:38).

Finally, Jesus was tempted by people to claim rulership as the Messiah before God's time. There were many prophecies in the Old Testament of the Messiah as King, and the people of Israel looked eagerly for their deliverer. Continue reading the record in John 6 of the feeding of the thousands.

Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world." Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone (John 6:14-15).

Satan also used those closest to Jesus to tempt Him in this way.

He [Jesus] said to them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and

be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 15,16,21-23).

Peter knew the scriptures. He knew the promised Messiah would deliver Israel and establish a Kingdom of righteousness that would last forever. No doubt Peter loved Jesus. He had left everything to follow Him. He was sincere and committed to the vision he saw revealed in scripture. But he was wrong. Jesus saw straight through all that and recognized the words of Peter to be inspired by Satan. He responded with the same words He used in Luke 4:8 when he was first tempted with rulership of the world. He would wait, and continues to wait, for God's timing to reign as King.

What an inspiration these accounts are to our Christian walk today! We may face temptation in a myriad of disguises: through pleasures and pressures, people we love and people not so lovable, the urge to have now and the fear of having never. But from these records we can learn some of the ways the enemy tempts believers and how we can effectively respond. We see that Satan will:

- get us to doubt our identity as God's children even though it is written, *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1a).*

- try to tell us God won't take care of our needs even though it is written, *"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).*

- get us looking for signs to perform which will glorify ourselves instead of God even though it is written, *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

- get us not to trust God's timing even though it is written, *"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).* And, *"to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).*

The temptations of Jesus were as real to Him as the ones we face today. Yet our Lord has demonstrated through His life, death, and resurrection that the promises of God never fail. Christ staked His life on the truth of God's promises of the Messiah, and now He is at the right hand of God, the Head of the Church, and will reign in the coming Kingdom. We can identify with our Savior and follow His example in standing up to the tests and attacks of the enemy by clinging to the promises of our Heavenly Father. And we can turn to Jesus Christ, as the one who went before us, to be our help in every situation. As the Book of Hebrews states:

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find the grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16).

[Leesa Railsback is a registered nurse and is involved with a small Bible fellowship and local dance ministry in Peoria, Illinois]

The Christian Perspective: The New Creation in Christ

Compare the Versions: II Cor. 5:14-21

NKJV

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then 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 rose again.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him

NIV

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.

NRSV

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

REB

For the love of Christ controls us once we have reached the conclusion that one died for all and therefore all mankind has died. He died for all so that those who live should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life. With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of anyone; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer. For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun.

All this has been the work of God. He has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has enlisted us in this ministry of reconciliation: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding people's misdeeds against them, and has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. It is as if God were appealing to you through us: we implore you in Christ's name, be reconciled to God! Christ was innocent of sin, and yet for our sake God made him one with human sinfulness, so that in him we might be made one with the righteousness of God.

Notes & Quotes

on the Bible

The New Creation in Christ

Chosen "in Him"

The central purpose of God's plan of salvation was to create for himself "a people" - children of his very own - who would share in the blessings of God's goodness and bring forth the fruits of their relationship with him "to the praise of his glory." This plan of God was "purposed" in Christ (Eph. 1:9) before the creation of the world and "accomplished" in time through Christ's redemptive work for God's people (Eph. 3:11). The central focus of this plan is clearly set forth in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians:

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 (Eph. 1:3-6).

Though God's choice to have a people in Christ was conceived in his love "before the creation of the world," it was worked out "in history" through God's choice of Abraham and his seed - Israel - to be the vehicle of bringing the blessings of his salvation to "all nations" of the world. This is explicitly recorded in the Book of Genesis:

Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him (Gen. 18:17-19; cf. 12:1-3; 15:1ff).

This promise to Abraham culminates in the coming of Jesus the Messiah from the people of Israel (Rom.

9:4-5). He is the true "seed of Abraham" (Gal. 3:16) and the "elect" or "chosen one" of God (Isa. 42:1-4; Luke 3:22, 9:35). He is, in fact, the representative leader of God's people (Dan. 7:13ff.); indeed, he is in a sense the ideal "Israel" (Matt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1; Isaiah 49:3) - embodying in himself God's purposes and destiny for his people.

Andrew Lincoln, in his commentary on Ephesians, explains about God's election of a people and the fulfillment of his purposes "in Christ":

God's purpose in choosing out a people for himself is of course a familiar idea in the OT (e.g., Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2), which witnesses to Israel's consciousness of God's choice of her in the midst of the twists and turns in her historical fortunes. God had chosen Abraham so that in him the nations of the earth would be blessed, and Israel's election was not for her own self-indulgence but for the blessing of the nations: it was a privilege but also a summons to service. Christian believers also had this consciousness of being chosen to be the people of God. The new element was the [in Christ] phrase. Their sense of God's gracious choice of them was inextricably interwoven with their sense of belonging to Christ. God's design for them to be his people had been effected in and through Christ. They saw him as God's Chosen One. Indeed, Paul in Gal. 3 treats Christ as in a sense fulfilling Israel's election. Christ is the offspring of Abraham par excellence (3:16) so that they too, because they are Christ's, are Abraham's offspring (3:29). The notion of being chosen in Christ here in Ephesians is likely to include the idea of incorporation into Christ as the representative on whom God's gracious decision was focused [WBC, Ephesians, p. 23].

Thus, it is "in Christ" that all of God's purposes for his people - as well as for his creation - are brought to fulfillment (Gal. 3:16-29; Eph. 1:3-14).

The phrase "in Christ" therefore sets forth a key concept that ties together the Old Testament and the New and that provides the basis for the life of all Christian believers¹. In fact, the "in Christ" concept is the key to both the continuity - as well as the discontinuity - which the NT people of God have in

¹ The phrase "In Christ" means "in Messiah", God's anointed Savior and King.

relationship to the OT people of God, Israel. As for continuity, NT scholar F.F. Bruce states,

Jesus provides *in himself* the vital continuity between the old Israel and the new, and his faithful followers were both the righteous remnant of the old and the nucleus of the new (The Origin of the Bible, p.12, Tyndale Pub., emphasis mine).

It is "in Christ" that new covenant believers "participate" in the "body" and "blood of Christ" - a truth that is so vividly symbolized in the Lord's supper (I Cor. 10:15-17). Jesus called out and chose his twelve apostles from the nation of Israel to be the leaders of his church, beginning as the faithful remnant of Israel (Matt. 16:18). It was specifically "for them" (i.e., "for you" Luke 22:19-20) - the representatives of the new covenant people of God - that Jesus' body was "broken" and Jesus' blood was "poured out". And so, through the apostles, Christ established with his church "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:14-20; cf. I Cor. 11). Thus, the continuity between the Old and the New Covenant people is established "in Christ."

But it is also "in Christ" that the discontinuity between the Old and the New takes place, for the new covenant people of God no longer consist of just "Israel according to the flesh" (I Cor. 10:18). Instead, "in Christ" the reconciliation of all mankind - both Jew and Gentile - has taken place. Therefore, all barriers between Jew and Gentile - as well as between man and God - have been broken down. The result is "one new man in Christ." As Ephesians states,

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away (i.e., Gentiles) have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself in our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two (Jews and Gentiles), thus making peace (Eph. 2:13-15).

Thus, via Christian believers' incorporation "in Christ" direct continuity is maintained with the Old Testament people of God - making the Old Testament the spiritual history of the Christian church. And yet, there is also discontinuity in the fact that the one people of God no longer consists of only "Israel according to the flesh" (I Cor. 10:18)

but has expanded to include all people - both Jew and Gentile - who by faith and the Spirit are incorporated "in Christ."

It is important to understand that both "election", "predestination" and the "in Christ" concept are all corporate concepts in the Bible. It is only by being incorporated into Christ - through faith and the Spirit - that individual believers become part of the "elect" or "chosen people" of God (e.g. Col. 3:12; I Pet. 1:2; 2:9). Just as Israel as a nation was called to be the OT chosen people of God, so in the new covenant era the people of God are the "elect" or "chosen people" of God only as a corporate entity "in Christ" (Eph. 1:4). As C.K. Barrett explains:

It is important to recall here that the seed of Abraham contracted till it became ultimately Christ (Gal. 3:16) and was subsequently expanded to include those who were in Christ. This means that election does not take place arbitrarily or fortuitously; it takes place always and only in Christ. They are elect who are in him; they who are elect are in him. It is failure to remember this that causes confusion over Paul's doctrine of election and predestination (cf. Gal. 3:29 emphasis mine). [Black's NT Commentaries, Romans, p. 171.].

F.F. Bruce, then, summarizes for us the NT doctrine of election in his commentary on Ephesians:

It was in Christ, then, that God chose his people "before the world's foundation." This phrase ... denotes the divine act of election as taking place in eternity. Time belongs to the created order: believers' present experience of the blessings bestowed by God is the fulfillment on the temporal plane of his purpose of grace toward them conceived in eternity. As the fulfillment is experienced "in Christ," so is in him that the purpose is conceived. If, as Col. 1:16 affirms, it was "in him" that all things were created, so we are assured, earlier still it was "in him" that the people of God were chosen. **He is the Chosen of God par excellence; it is by union with him, according to the divine purpose realized in time, that others are chosen** [NICNT, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, p. 254, Eerdmans).

"New Creation!"

It is important to realize that the phrase "in Christ" encapsulates an eschatological perspective - i.e., a perspective which recognizes the fulfillment of God's promises, bringing "the end" to this present age, and ushering in the age to come. This perspective was the driving force of the new covenant believers of the first century church. The resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit were clear signs to the first century church that the end of the present age had already begun and that the firstfruits of the age to come was already theirs. They were thus a people living "between the times" of the old and the new creation. But, as C.K. Barrett explains, it was only "in Christ" that believers now participated in this reality.

"In Christ" is itself a Pauline phrase of central ... significance. It is best explained as originating ... in primitive Christian eschatology. The death and resurrection of Jesus were eschatological events, effecting the transition from this age to the age to come. Believers could take advantage of this transition, but the transference from the one age to the other could take place only "in Christ" (ibid., p. 119).

A key verse in understanding this perspective is, of course, II Cor. 5:17. I quote this verse in several different versions for comparison sake:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (NKJV; italicized words are not in the underlying Greek text).

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come (NIV).

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (NRSV).

For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun (REB).

All of these translations have their good points but the New Geneva Study Bible summarizes the thought behind the verse in one of its notes and points out a key matter regarding the translation of this verse:

In Christ: Union with Christ summarizes our experience of redemption. Believers are elected (Eph. 1:4, 11), justified (Rom. 8:1), sanctified (I Cor. 1:2), and glorified (3:18) "in Christ." Here Paul focuses on the momentous significance of the believer's union with the Savior. Because Christ is the "last Adam," the One in whom humanity is recreated (I Cor. 15:45; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:10) and who inaugurates the new age of messianic blessing (Gal. 1:4; cf. Matt. 11:2-6), the believer's spiritual union with Christ is nothing less than participation in the "new creation." Translating "there is a new creation" instead of "he is a new creation" draws this conclusion more clearly, but the thought is there either way [p. 1835].

This is certainly an important point. "In Christ" believers have already become not just a new creation but a part of God's entire "new creation" of the coming age. The whole outlook of Christian believers should be conditioned by this reality. Believers' lives are no longer to be "conformed to this age" but to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Rom. 12:2).

Richard B. Hays in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* summarizes this NT perspective for believers today:

According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus was an apocalyptic [or, eschatological] event that signaled the end of the old age and portended the beginning of the new. Paul's moral vision is intelligible only when his apocalyptic perspective is kept clearly in mind: the church is to find its identity and vocation by recognizing its role within the cosmic drama of God's reconciliation of the world to himself.

The image of "new creation" belongs to the thought-world of Jewish apocalypticism. One of the fundamental beliefs of apocalyptic thought was its doctrine of the "two ages": the present age of evil and suffering was to be superseded by a glorious messianic age in which God would prevail over injustice and establish righteousness in a restored Israel." Paul's use of the phrase "new creation" echoes Isaiah's prophecy of hope:

For I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the

sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress (Isa. 65:17-19 NRSV; cp. II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21-22).

When we hear 2 Cor. 5 in the context of Isaiah's fervent prophetic hope for the renewal of the world, we understand that Paul is proclaiming that the church has already entered the sphere of the eschatological age.

The apocalyptic scope of 2 Corinthians 5 was obscured by older translations that rendered the phrase in verse 17 as "he is a new creation" (RSV) or - worse yet - "he is a new creature" (KJV). Such translations seriously distort Paul's meaning by making it appear that he is describing only the personal transformation of the individual through conversion experience. The sentence in Greek, however, lacks both subject and verb; a very literal translation might treat the words "new creation" as an exclamatory interjection: "If anyone is in Christ - new creation!" ... Paul is not talking about an individual's subjective experience of renewal through conversion; rather, for Paul, ktisis ("creation") refers to the whole created order (cf. Rom. 8:18-25). He is proclaiming the apocalyptic message that through the cross God has nullified the kosmos of sin and death and brought a new kosmos into being. That is why Paul can describe himself and his readers as those "on whom the ends of the ages have met" (I Cor. 10:11). The old age is passing away (cf. I Cor. 7:31b), the new age has appeared in Christ, and the church stands at the juncture between

them. [The Moral Vision of the New Testament, pp. 19-20, Harper- Collins]

Whichever translation is chosen it is this perspective that should dominate the thinking of all who are "in Christ." In him "the old has gone, the new has come." It is for the purpose of participating in this "new creation" that God has called us and chosen us to be his children - so as to be a people who are transformed by the power and vision of all that we have in Christ. Once again, as so often, Paul's letter to the Ephesians summarizes these great truths in God's plan of salvation:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 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 his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:8-10 NIV).

This is truly "amazing grace!" May we be found worthy of such a high and holy calling.

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Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies,
Inc.

P.O.Box 473

Cary, NC 27511