
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

A few weeks after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, on the Day of Pentecost, the gift of the holy Spirit was poured out on a small group of believers in Jerusalem. Empowered by this gift the apostle Peter stood in front of thousands of people and preached the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. When Peter finished preaching about three thousand people accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Christian church had officially begun! So much for the first day, now what?

Think of it. Here they were, twelve apostles and about three thousand new believers. These people had no church building of their own, no church by-laws, no committees, no organizational flow charts, no seminars on church growth, or discipleship or finances. What a way to start! Talk about jumping off the diving board before you check to see if the pool has any water!

What did these believers have? They had the scriptures of the Old Testament. They had twelve apostles with the teachings of Jesus burning in their hearts. They had the gift of the holy Spirit, God, Christ and each other. And with these they showed forth a great love for God and a zeal to witness for Christ.

Now, many new movements begin with great zeal and enthusiasm like this. But sooner or later the fires die out and the movement is gone. There were some in the Jerusalem religious establishment who thought this might happen to the Christians too (Acts 5:34-39). But it didn't. The church grew in spiritual maturity and in numbers of people, and great witness was given for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Down through the years since these first Christians the spiritual fire in the church has at times burned brightly and it has also smoldered, but it has never gone out. God has always had a group of people who have lived their lives according to His Word who have set the fire ablaze again. In Acts chapter 2, God's Word gives us a set of fundamental principles concerning how the early church operated and lived. These fundamental principles when faithfully adhered to in action and in heart will produce the same godly results today as they did in the first century. Here is the snap shot of the early church.

Then those who gladly received his [Peter's] words were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders

and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47, NKJV)

After becoming a part of the young church the believers continued steadfastly in five essential activities. They became a company of the committed, devoted to the apostle's doctrine (or teaching), to fellowship, to prayer, to gracious giving, and to witnessing. Now some Christian churches or fellowships excel at teaching God's Word, others at prayer, and others perhaps at witnessing. But in order for a church to be healthy there needs to be a balance of all five of these foundational activities. A balanced church will be a healthy church. Blessed are the balanced!

By integrating all five of these activities any group of believers will be more loving through fellowship, more solid through learning God's Word, stronger through prayer, abundant through gracious giving, and larger through witnessing. And yes, numbers of people do matter, God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2: 4). Where and how these activities take place is not as important as that they do take place.

To continue in the apostle's doctrine first and foremost means to learn God's Word, especially the truths concerning Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Our greatest need as believers is to understand the good news so that we can live it fully and also share it with others. In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul writes that,

...the gospel...is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the regenerating, life changing, saving power of God. Everything else that a church may do springs from this fountain of grace.

Fellowship is our life together under the authority of the Word. It is a full participation in and a full sharing of the blessings of the gospel with one another. We now share a common life with God, Christ and one another through the Spirit (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3; Eph. 2:18). We also share a common destiny of eternal glory in the kingdom of God and a common mission to witness for Christ in the world.

Gracious giving allows us to honor the Lord with our possessions. It helps to meet the needs of the church and the people of God. It teaches us to trust in God. And it lays up a good foundation for the age to come (1 Timothy 6:19). A commitment to prayer is the heartbeat of any group of believers. Prayer to God giving prominence to personal devotion and worship, and having a special regard to God's will and power is essential for power in the church. And witnessing for Christ is how the Lord adds to the church daily.

The church exists for two basic reasons – to evangelize in order to win people to Christ, and then secondly to edify the believers helping them to grow in Christ-like character. Incorporating these fundamental principles from Acts 2 will help you accomplish these goals. The first century church succeeded where many churches fail today, even with all our so called modern innovations, simply because they were committed to these five fundamental principles of teaching God's Word, fellowship, prayer, gracious giving and witnessing. If we desire to be effective in sharing the gospel today and to bring glory to God we must be faithful to these principles as well.

Chuck LaMattina

Continuing In the Apostles’ Doctrine

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The Christian church is the worldwide community of believers in the one God, our Father, and the one Lord, Jesus Christ. This community of believers originally began as a small group of disciples of Jesus Christ which he taught and led during his earthly ministry. Later, after his death, resurrection and giving of the Spirit on Pentecost, this small community of believers expanded to encompass a community of believers throughout the world.

From the very beginning of his ministry Jesus knew the mission for which God had sent him as the Christ of God – that is, to be the savior of the world. Therefore, from this group of disciples Jesus specifically chose twelve men to be his apostles so that they could become the leaders of the first century church. These men were to set forth the foundational teachings of the church for generations of believers to come. The books of Luke and Mark record the importance and significance of Christ’s calling of his apostles:

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated as apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:12-16 NIV)

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted and they

came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:13-15)

Throughout his life Jesus taught his apostles by both word and deed, and specifically prepared them for their future ministry which would begin with the pouring out of God’s Spirit at Pentecost.

Let there be no doubt, however, Jesus himself is the founder, foundation, and cornerstone of the Christian church. The Christian church is built on him alone. This is clear from the New Testament Scriptures, as we see specifically in the Gospel of Matthew:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:13-19)

The Christian church is built on the belief and confession that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” It was the duty of the apostles of Christ to be faithful witnesses of, as well as bold proclaimers of, this central foundational truth.

Throughout the New Testament this same truth is proclaimed as being the central point of faith upon which salvation is received and the community of God's people is built. It is the teachings of the apostles of Christ based upon what Jesus himself did, taught and later revealed through the Spirit that enable believers through all generations to stand together in the unity of the Spirit and on the one foundation of Jesus Christ.

This devotion to the fundamental truths of the gospel as embodied in the apostle's teaching made it possible for God to act mightily in the lives of the first century believers. Immediately after Christ's death and resurrection and just before the day of Pentecost Jesus gave many further instructions to his apostles regarding their mission to come. The book of Acts explains:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave 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."

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:1-11)

The rest of the New Testament Scriptures show that the apostles of Christ were faithful to these instructions that they had been given. After the outpouring of God's gift of holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter, together with the other eleven apostles, boldly proclaimed the truth that Jesus was the risen Lord and Christ and that through him the long awaited day of salvation was now dawning. Those who accepted this apostolic message stood together in one heart and soul on these teachings of the apostles. As the book of Acts states,

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42)

The ultimate result of this devotion to the apostles' teaching was that,

...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47)

It is this salvific message about God's redemptive work in Christ that is the central focus of the teaching of the apostles. Their teaching was in direct continuity with the Old Testament scriptures and was tied together through all that Christ himself had done, taught and commanded them to teach. Thankfully, today, we also have the teachings

of the apostles preserved for us in the New Testament scriptures. When we faithfully give ourselves to learning, living and teaching the New Testament scriptures we also are devoting ourselves to the apostles' teaching - just as the original believers of the first century church. In short, we are building our lives upon the sure foundation of Christ. As the book of Ephesians states,

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 himself as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:18-20)

May we as the Christian church faithfully steward, preserve and make known those same words of life which the original apostles taught and which are now preserved for us, through God's providential care, in the New Testament scriptures.

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“Didache”

When The Book of Acts speaks of the “apostles' teaching” it uses the Greek word “didache” for the word “teaching.” NT scholar Joseph Fitzmyer explains its meaning

The *didache*, “teaching,” is the basis of Christian doctrine, built on the words and deeds of Jesus himself (Acts 1:1), on his instruction of the apostles (1:2) and those followers who would become his authenticated witnesses (10:41). This teaching, which appears again in 5:28, 13:12, 17:19, is the reason why Christian followers are called *mathetai*, “learners, disciples” (6:1, cf. 11:26). [J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible, The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 270, Doubleday].

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Fellowship

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I recently read of a church, which hit upon a new method of outreach; it is mailing a videotaped message to every household in the county where it is located. That is certainly a modern way of approaching an old topic, and since most people have a VCR, it may just work for some people.

Perhaps, though, there is another way, one that is not as modern in a technological sense, but one that is tested and proven, and which will work in any age with or without technology. What if there was a model – somewhere in the Bible – that would provide a pattern for the conduct and growth of the church regardless of technological prowess? Moreover, what if that model would provide a blueprint for the operation of the church and the enhancement of the lives of believers on a daily basis, in addition to outlining the church's growth? Well, there is such a model presented in Acts 2:42-47.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayer. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (KJV)

A close look at these verses discloses the timeless truths that make them applicable

in any situation, in any society, at any time. To begin, verse 42 says that the believers continued steadfastly in several things. The words “continued steadfastly” are one word in the Greek and should perhaps be translated “were continuing”. In other words, these believers were continuously doing certain things on an ongoing basis, rather than doing them only once, or sporadically, or occasionally. Verse 42 tells us specifically that they were continuing “*in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*”

These fourteen English words give us a wealth of information about the church at this time. The believers were dedicated to doctrine (the teaching of God’s Word), fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. Before we zero in on the subject of “fellowship” notice how all these activities are presented. They are given in a list and are each connected to the others by the word “and.” In normal speech, if we were to list these items we would typically separate the first three by commas (if we were writing) and would separate the last item from the others with the word “and.” In other words, we would likely say “apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.” But here, they are each separated by the word “and.”

Using “and” to connect these items is the figure of speech polysyndeton, meaning “many ands.” This figure of speech is used when the author or speaker wants to place equal emphasis on each item in the list. God places equal emphasis on all of the activities listed in verse 42. These items are all equally important. Having said that we can now look at the specific item of “fellowship.”

There several closely related words in Greek which are or could be translated “fellowship.” These words are used in a variety of contexts, including some unlikely ones, such as what we might consider to be a

business relationship (Luke 5:10 describes James and John as Peter’s partners in the fishing business. The word “partners” is the plural form of one of the words translated at other places as “fellowship).” Interestingly, and unlike a common usage today, these words for “fellowship” are never used biblically of a meeting, a gathering, or the place where some sort of meeting is conducted. Rather, they have a much greater meaning, as Hebrews 2:14 shows.

In as much then as the children have partaken [koinoneo – one of the words translated as fellowship] of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared [metecho – to partake of, share in] in the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is the devil. (NKJV)

This verse states a very basic fact; that all children partake of flesh and blood, which is all that they, as natural persons can have. It is the sum total of all that is genetically available to a child from his or her father and mother. In a similar fashion, though God was his Father, Jesus shared in our full humanity. He was a real man, who suffered a real death, but who then experienced a real resurrection conquering death and the devil.

For purposes of this article, the significance of this verse is in what it tells us about fellowship. To be involved in fellowship means to take fully, to share fully in what is available. What it is that is being shared fully is indicated by the context. In this verse, for example, what is being shared fully is the nature of a natural person: flesh and blood. Luke 5:10 tells us that James and John shared fully with Peter in a business venture; in other words they shared fully in the profits, losses, assets, liabilities, opportunities, etc. that came with the fishing business.

In yet other verses, the context tells us that we can share fully in such diverse things

as financial giving (Romans 15:26 - "contribution")

=koinonia –fellowship), other men's sins (1 Timothy 5:22), and Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). Thus, we must look at the context to see what is being fully shared.

In Acts 2:42-47 the believers shared fully in the apostles' teaching, breaking of bread, prayers, having fear or reverence of God. They were together, having all things in common, selling their possessions and goods and parting them to all who had a need. What a group of believers! They each laid aside their individual, personal differences and came together in all the significant facets of their lives, sharing with each other and living in accordance with what they understood of the Word of God. They shared the life of God in Christ that was in them with one another freely. This is fellowship; being involved in each others needs and joys, exhorting one another, encouraging one another, praying for one another, loving one another in word and deed. The result of this kind of fellowship was that *"the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved"* (vs. 47).

What a passage of Scripture Acts 2:42-47 is! What church or group of believers would not be thrilled to have this sort of closeness among it's believers and outreach to others? Perhaps the question should be asked another way: how many churches today have such closeness and outreach?

It might well be that at this threshold of the twenty first century, we should look back in time almost two thousand years, and return to this passage to again apply it in our day and time. Continuing in teaching, and sharing fully with one another, and breaking bread and prayers must work in the same way now that it did here in Acts 2. God has not changed. His Word is still true. Why not try it?

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Prayer

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Certainly one of the most exciting times in history was the period of the early Christian church as chronicled in the book of Acts. God's gift of holy Spirit, first poured out to all believers on the day of Pentecost, enabled those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ to manifest great power to an extent which has only been hinted at in the revivals that have followed since the first century. Nowhere was this power more evident than in the prayers of the church in Acts. What made the prayers of those first Christians so effective, so powerful? This article will explore a few of the many verses on prayer in search of an answer to this question. A picture of the life of the early church is given to us in Acts 2:42-47.

These verses yield important keys to the phenomenal power the first century church experienced as they

"continued steadfastly...in prayers vs. 42 NKJV)."

These keys are: 1. prayer according to the will of God, 2. persistence, 3. fear/trust in God, 4. thanksgiving, 5. fellowship.

The first key is prayer according to the will of God. Psalm 145:18 says,

The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth.

Perhaps this is why the prayers of Paul so often included a request that the believers received knowledge (Ephesians 1:17, Colossians 1:9). Understanding and knowledge of what God wills in any situation enables us to *"call upon Him in truth"* because we are praying for those things which God has promised to fulfill. On the other hand, James 4 explicitly states the results of prayer outside of God's will.

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:2, 3)

Contrast this with John 17. The entire chapter is the prayer of Jesus shortly before his arrest. What a perfect and noble example of the submission of one's will to the will of God. What a beautiful and inspiring account of prayer in complete agreement with the purposes of our heavenly Father.

Take a fresh look at the "Lord's Prayer" recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 as an example of this concept. Too often we take "Your will be done" as meaning we have no way of knowing what God wants to happen. Jesus said in John 14:13

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

Implicit in this statement is that what we ask is according to God's will. Asking in the name of Jesus Christ acknowledges that he always acted according to the will of his heavenly Father as John 14:9-11 clearly states. God has lovingly provided us with His Word, His written will. We can know what God would accomplish and because of this we have the assurance recorded in 1 John 5.

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (vss. 14, 15)"

Could God say it any plainer? Prayer according to His will gets answered. The second key to powerful prayer is persistence. This is not to be confused with simple

repetition. As a matter of fact, Jesus warned against mere repetition in Matthew 6:7, 8.

"And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

According to Webster's Dictionary, to persist is "to continue in the face of some opposition." This principle of persistence is addressed by Jesus in Luke 11. In verses 1-4, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, and Jesus responds with what is known as the "Lord's Prayer." Then he continues with the following illustration:

And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Luke 11:5-10)

The parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8 is another vivid example of this principle. The church epistles also contain encouragement in this area. Ephesians 6:18 says,

Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."

And Colossians 4:2 reminds us to “*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.*”

The third key is the fear of and trust in God. As expressed so wonderfully in Psalm 145:19,

“He will fulfill the desires of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.”

Vine’s Expository Dictionary defines fear as “reverential fear of God, as a controlling motive of the life, in matters spiritual and moral, not a mere ‘fear’ of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him, a ‘fear’ which banishes the terror that shrinks from His presence, and which influences the disposition and attitude of one whose circumstances are guided by trust in God, through the indwelling Spirit of God.”

This fear is an attitude of complete reliance upon God and His power. It is an attitude, which recognizes the holiness of God and endeavors to please Him in every aspect of life. It is an attitude that whole-heartedly trusts God to bring to pass His perfect will no matter what the obstacle, no matter what the circumstance. Our Savior certainly exemplified this quality of fear in his life and ministry. Hebrews 5:7-9 says,

...in the days of His flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though he was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was able to minister God’s Word in the face of incredible opposition and unbelief, to face a horrible

death by crucifixion, because he knew the Scriptures. He knew God’s will for his life, he feared God, and trusted in God’s ability and willingness to fulfill His promises (Mark 11:22-24). The early church had this same fear as they steadfastly prayed to God (Acts 2:43).

The fourth concept inextricably linked with prayer is that of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Yet, Holy One, you who make your home in the praises of Israel, in you our father’s put their trust, they trusted you and you rescued them; they called to you for help and they were saved, they never trusted you in vain. (Psalm 22:3-5 Jerusalem Bible)

In the Old Testament, the presence of God was in the Holy Place in the tabernacle and later in the temple. In these verses “praises” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for the sanctuary where the praises were offered, emphasizing the importance of thanksgiving when appealing to God. Philippians 4:6 encourages Christians to

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

And Ephesians 5:20 exhorts us in

“giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And look at just a few of the things for which we have to be thankful. We have salvation through Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9, 10); the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21); justification (Romans 4:25); an inheritance sealed with the gift of holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14); and citizenship in the heavenlies (Philippians 3:20). What great and glorious works God has already accomplished on our behalf! How worthy is He of our fear and trust. How much more will He do for us

as we keep our hearts and minds focused on Him in praise.

The fifth element is fellowship. Hebrews 10:25 encourages us in,

“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another...”

Although there are unquestionably many instances of God accomplishing great things through the prayers of individuals, the power of prayer from committed groups of believers is also present. Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 18.

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:19, 20)

There is great power in the fellowship of believers who are united together to seek God’s will (Acts 4:23-31). Look at Paul’s request for prayer in light of this.

Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. (Romans 15:30-32)

But perhaps the most compelling evidence for the idea of fellowship in prayer (and every aspect of our walk) comes through the richness of the metaphor of the body of Christ as revealed in Ephesians. For when we as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can truly see ourselves as one body, with Christ as the head, then we can join together in prayer with singleness of purpose: the accomplishment of

the will of God. This was the desire of our Lord Jesus Christ when he poured out his heart to God as recorded in John 17.

“that they all may be one, as You Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in 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)

By looking at a few examples from the book of Acts we can see how the five elements discussed were practiced by the believers, and the awesome results to the prayers of the saints

In Acts 3 and 4, Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful. Peter’s speech following this miracle resulted in many people being added to the church. But it also resulted in the arrest of Peter and John by the Jewish religious leaders, and threats to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. After their release, Peter and John returned to the believers and had a prayer meeting where they first rehearsed the will of God in His plan of salvation (vss.24-28) and that prayed,

“Now Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was

his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:29-33)

In Acts 12, King Herod had James the brother of John killed, and Peter put in prison, intending to have him killed also after Passover. Verse 5 says that *'constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.'* The following verses relate Peter's release from prison by an angel from God and his reunion with believers (who were still busy praying while he was knocking on the door!). Soon after this, Herod was struck dead, and verse 24 says *"But the word of God grew and multiplied."* Acts 13 and 14 recounts the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabus. The journey started with prayer (Acts 13:1-3). The result was the light of the Word brought to the gentiles. As Acts 13:49 says,

"...the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region."

In Acts 16 Paul and Silas delivered a slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination. But this act angered her masters who profited from her bondage. They convinced the magistrates of the city to have Paul and Silas arrested, beaten and thrown into prison.

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed." (vss. 25, 26)

After this, the prison keeper and his family received the message of salvation and were born again (vss. 27-34). The next day Paul and Silas were released and

"when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed." (vs. 40)

In each account, we can see how the believers had integrated the will of God, persistence, fear and trust, thanksgiving and fellowship into their lives. How powerfully God was able to move in that day and time. May we heed the call of God's incomparable word and make these five principles of prayer a part of our lives to the glory of God.

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Recommended Commentaries on the Book of Acts

For those who are interested in a detailed study of the Book of Acts two scholarly commentaries are recommended:

1. F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Book of Acts*, Eerdmans.
2. Joseph Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible Commentary, The Acts of the Apostles*, Doubleday.

These two NT scholars, F.F. Bruce and Joseph Fitzmyer, are extremely learned in biblical languages, history and culture. While Bruce is from an evangelical background and Fitzmyer is from a Roman Catholic background, what marks each of these works is not denominational bias, but honest and intelligent scrutiny of the biblical record in the light of biblical, linguistic and historical background. Both focus on expounding the text of Acts in the light of its original meaning and purpose. Though neither of these commentaries is light reading, anyone who desires to tap into the detailed knowledge of two of this century's leading NT scholars will greatly benefit from either, or both, of these two works. Both are available through CBD.

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Gracious Giving

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In the book of Acts there are certain activities in the believer's lives that are documented for us because they are significant examples of how to live the Word today. In Acts, chapter 2 we read,

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers. Then fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47 NKJV)

When you look at these verses and really think about each phrase and what it meant to live that way, it tells you so much about what believers valued in life and how those values directed their behavior. For example, verses 44 and 45 state:

All who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

One activity in which the believers eagerly engaged was that of gracious giving. They looked upon one another and saw the beauty of their love for God; how they responded to God's calling with true belief and loving actions bound them to one another. They knew when a need was present in each

other's lives and they did what they could to help. This is such an important key for today's believers to understand, because it sometimes isn't enough to pray and think that God in some mysteriously divine way will meet each and every need that arises in the lives of His people. God does meet our needs, but many times he is at work in the believers to move toward a brother in Christ in a way that will supply their lack, and bring comfort and courage.

There is a story about a little boy who was in his bed at night during a bad thunderstorm. The young boy was scared and called out to his dad for comfort. His father came into the room and took his son into his arms and said, "Don't worry. There's nothing to fear. God is always here with us." "I know" said the little boy, "but right now I need someone with skin on to hold me." In many ways that's what you and I are when you think about it. We are God with skin on. You were made in the image of God. You carry in your spiritual character the strength, tenderness and compassion of God. He is there in you to help you give to others. This makes gracious giving an exhilarating experience!

Our attitude in giving is of crucial importance. As God our Father has shown us, our giving should be done"

1. freely (Romans 8:32b – "*shall He not...freely give us all things.*")
2. lovingly and graciously (John 3:16 – "*God so loved...that he gave His only begotten Son*")
3. richly (1 Timothy 6:17b – "*...God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy*")

As we give, God's wisdom can guide and direct us in our understanding of what and where to give. As we obey God's will He will work in us "*both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).*" It is also encouraging to know that he

enables and strengthens us “*with might through His Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16b)*.” If we truly wish to honor God with our money and material possessions (Proverbs 3:9, 10) as we give our offerings in church and our gifts to individual believers, He will show us exactly how to do this.

Each and every one of us has been given an extremely high and holy calling. Before time began God gave us this calling. As 2 Timothy 1:9 tells us, “*God...has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.*”

God has a plan and a purpose for your life today; do you know what it is? Will you spend time in prayer today asking God to show you now what you can do, where you can be a gracious giver to fulfill His purpose? What activities are you pursuing that imitate those of the first century believer in order to bring glory to God? Gracious giving is an exciting part of our Christian privileges and responsibilities.

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The Unity of the Spirit Web-site

The Unity of the Spirit web-site continues to grow and expand under the administration of Adam Kleczkowski. In addition to having every issue of *The Unity of the Spirit*, the web-site also includes many other features including information about many of the activities of our Foundation and Grace Ministry as well as the “Weekly Thoughts” section by Adam. We would also like to invite anyone who receives this newsletter to put a picture of your fellowship on the web-site on our picture gallery section:

<http://www.unity-of-spirit.org>

For The Honor of His Name

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One of the vital New Testament experiences, in which the first century church was engaged, was witnessing to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. As they boldly proclaimed the good news in word and deed,

“the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47 NKJV).”

Witnessing is our privilege and responsibility too. God has “given to us the ministry” and “word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19). Therefore each and every one of us should strive to be the best Ambassador for Christ that we can be.

But the ultimate question is, “Why?” Why do we want to make known the gospel of Jesus Christ? A very good answer is that we love people and want to see them enter the kingdom of God. But a better answer is that we make known the gospel for the honor and glory of God. This is the only answer meaningful enough to keep you passionate about outreach when people let you down, and when times are hard.

When you search deep into the Word of God you find a God whose commitment to reconcile the world to Himself, is rooted not in His people, but in Himself alone. God’s passion to save people and bring them to eternal glory springs not from the shallow soil of our worthiness, but from the infinite depth of His own. Over and over again in the Bible God says that what He does, He does for His own name’s sake. God delights to make His name known, to bring honor and glory to His person. God desires for His glory to be publicly known. When God does something for His name sake, He does it to advance His reputation so that people might see the kind of God He is and trust in Him (Psalm 9:10).

When Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray, how did he begin? He began by saying, “*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name (Matthew 6:9, 10).*” In this simple prayer Jesus teaches us that the goal of all our prayers and all our actions is the glory of God (Matthew 5:13-16).

In 1 Samuel 12 we have a story that reveals to us what ultimately motivates God to have mercy on sinners. In the context, the days of the judges are over and everyone is doing what is right in his own eyes. The land is full of chaos and the people call out for the prophet Samuel to give them a king (1 Sam. 8:7). This upsets Samuel so he goes to God and God tells him to do as they ask for they have not rejected Samuel but God. Only the people should know their wickedness in doing this. Samuel does what God says and tells the people of their terrible wickedness (12:17-19). After the people have been brought to fear and repentance, then comes the good news:

“Do not fear...For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.” (12:20, 22)

This is the heart of the gospel! Even though people sin and sin greatly, nevertheless there is hope, because God will not cast away His people. And the ultimate reason why God will not abandon His people is “for His great name’s sake.” The deepest reason that God gives for His commitment to His people is His prior commitment to the honor and glory of His name. God was pleased to make Israel His people in such an intimate manner that His name is at stake in their destiny. Therefore, for the reputation and honor and glory of His name, God will not cast away His people! Yes, love and mercy motivate God, but a deeper motivation is His glory.

God chose Israel so that they would bring glory to His name. In Isaiah 43:21 God says,

“This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.”

In 2 Samuel, David reveals why God redeemed Israel from Egypt and gave them the Promised Land.

And who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth who God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name... (7:23)^I

In other words, God brought Israel out of Egypt by great and mighty works, to make Himself a name, to give Himself a great reputation. In Exodus 9 God reveals why He didn’t just cut Pharaoh down in one swift blow for his stubbornness. He says,

But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. (vs. 16 – see also Romans 9:17)^{II}

The goal of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt (besides their freedom and other spiritual blessings) was to demonstrate to the world the awesome power of God that His name might be glorified and His reputation magnified!

In the New Testament, the church is the continuation of the people of God and so Peter declares,

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)^{III}

God’s primary motivation in all His works is the honor of His holy name. His love

^I See also Isaiah 48:9-11; 63:12-14; Psalm 106:7,8; Nehemiah 9:10; Ezekiel 20:9; 36:20-23; 39:25 Daniel 9:15

^{II} One of the effects of God’s zeal for His name was the salvation of Rahab. Joshua 2:8-14

^{III} See also Ephesians 1:5, 6, 12

and mercy to people are rooted in the infinite worth of His reputation. That's why God's people are secure in His love.

It was for God's reputation, His name, that Jesus Christ devotedly and passionately taught, ministered and died. The honor of God burned in Christ's heart! In John 5:43 Jesus said he came to minister in his Father's name. All of his great works were done in his Father's name (John 10:25). In his High Priestly prayer in John 17 Jesus said that he had manifested God's name (vs.6), had declared it, and would continue to declare it (vs. 26). The whole ministry of Jesus Christ was essentially to reveal and honor and bring glory to the name of God, especially in his final sacrifice. Here's what he said in Jon 12:

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name" Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." (vs. 27, 28)

Christ's death on the cross vindicated God's name, or cleared His reputation from every accusation of unrighteousness in His forgiveness of sinners.^{IV}

The glory of God motivated Jesus Christ to serve and it motivated the apostle Paul as well. In Romans 1, Paul says,

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name (vs. 6).

Jesus Christ commissioned Paul as an apostle for the sake of his name.^V When the good news is made known, when the name of Jesus Christ is honored, when people confess him as Lord, ultimately the name of God is glorified! As Philippians 2:11 declares,

... that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The honor of Jesus Christ, which ultimately led to the honor and glory of the name of God, is what burned in the heart of Paul. This is what motivated him to make know the good news, no matter what it took, no matter how much he had to endure.

The only thing that will keep us constantly motivated to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God is the knowledge that every saved individual brings glory to the name of God! Love for people is a great motivation, but it's not great enough. Sooner or later your love will falter and people will frustrate and disappoint you. There is nothing worthy enough in other people to keep your passion for outreach hot. But there is everything worthy in the name of God!

Our God is pursuing with omnipotent delight a worldwide campaign of gathering a people from all nations for the honor and glory of His name. God's omnipotent and faithful commitment to His name, His fame, His reputation, is over us and all that we endeavor to do. Therefore, expect great things from God and attempt great things for God! As we go forth lovingly and boldly proclaiming the good news God will work along with us for His name's sake. His name will not be profaned forever.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news ,who proclaims peace, who bring glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Is. 52:7)

Let us steadfastly commit ourselves to making known the good news for the honor and glory of God.

^{IV} Romans 3:25, 26

^V Acts 9:16

The Unity of the Spirit is a free newsletter published quarterly through the *Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.* and *Grace Ministry USA*. The purpose of *The Unity of the Spirit* is to help Christian believers to better understand and live according to the truth of God's Word so that we may grow together as the one body of Christ. All scripture citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted. Unsigned articles or notations are by one of the editors: Richie and Dorota Temple, Chuck and Marilee LaMattina and Scot Hahn.

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The study booklet *God's Plan of Salvation* is available free of charge from the same addresses above.

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