
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-Believers,

There is no better time of the year to contemplate the purpose for which God sent our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into the world than the Christmas holiday season which is already upon us. Certainly, the great majority of Christian believers realize that Christmas, if it is to have any useful meaning at all, must be a time to celebrate Christ's birth and the reasons for which he came.

There are many verses in the New Testament which summarize the meaning and significance of what Christ came to accomplish by his life, death, resurrection and future return (e.g. John 3:16; I John 3:8b; Mark 10:45; Gal. 4:4-7). Each of these verses emphasizes one or another aspect of God's plan of salvation because Jesus is, above all else, our "Savior, Christ the Lord." This, of course, was the "good news" that was announced almost two thousand years ago to the shepherds who were watching their flocks at night in the fields of Judea:

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).

Unfortunately, this simple message of "great joy" has long since been engulfed by an avalanche of century upon century of pagan tradition and now by an ever increasing tide of commercialization. There

are however two very important truths contained in the angel's announcement to those shepherds that still resonate with tremendous meaning and urgency for a world in need today.

The first truth is the meaning of the words a "Savior, Christ the Lord." Inherent in these words is the central - and simple - message of the Bible itself. As with all words used in the Bible we must understand these titles "Savior," "Christ" and "Lord" based upon their original biblical meaning as found in the scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. Since biblical revelation is progressive and moves forward from the Old Testament to the New, each of these terms takes on added clarity and depth of meaning as the biblical plan of salvation unfolds in ever greater detail.

All three of the titles above are Messianic titles which describe the mission and role of the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus our Savior is "Christ the Lord" because he is also "the Lord's (God's) Christ" (Acts 4:26). In other words, Jesus is God's anointed Messiah, as foretold in Old Testament prophecy. He is God's agent through which God's plan of salvation is accomplished. As the Messiah of God, Jesus had to first be "obedient unto death" as the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53 so as "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Only after his "sufferings" and then his victorious resurrection could he "enter into his glory" (Luke 24) as the exalted "Lord" and "Christ" in fulfillment of Psalm 110 (cf. Acts 2:22-36). It is from his exalted position in heaven that he will one day return in power and glory to "bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb. 9:28). This will be the

time of the "restoration of all things" as "foretold by all the prophets" (Acts 3:18-26). The time when all of God's people and creation will enjoy "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:18-22; cf. Phil. 3:20-21).

This brings us to the second great truth of the angel's announcement because this "good news of great joy" about our Savior, Christ the Lord is meant to be for "all people." This is later spelled-out in greater detail in the book of I Timothy:

*This is good, and pleases God our Savior,
who wants all men to be saved and to
come to a knowledge of the truth.*

*For there is one God and one mediator
between God and men, the man Christ
Jesus,*

*who gave himself as a ransom for all men
- the testimony given in its proper time (I
Tim. 2:3-6).*

In Christ Jesus, God has acted to break down every barrier that separates mankind from God as well as mankind from his fellowman. For the Jewish people of Jesus' day a "crucified Messiah" (I Cor. 2:23) was a contradiction in terms - even a scandal! Their understanding of the Messiah was focused on looking for a delivering king who would free the Jewish nation from its political bondage. How then could such a Messiah be crucified? Especially since to hang on a tree was nothing less than a curse according to the Old Testament scriptures. And yet contrary to all expectations it was through "becoming a curse for us" that Jesus "redeemed us" in order that "the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles [all people, not just Jews] through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:13-14).

It is this simple gospel message that is the "good news of great joy" announced by the angel. And it is *in* this simple gospel message that "the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery" (I Cor. 2:6-8) has now been revealed and displayed in all its fullness. God's "plan of the ages" (Eph. 3:11) has been put into effect through Christ. He has broken down all barriers so as to make true reconciliation and peace available to *all* people through faith in Christ:

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once
were far away have been brought near
through the blood of Christ.*

*For he himself is our peace, who has
made the two one and has destroyed the
barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,*

*... 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 (Eph.
2:13-16).*

The result is a new family of God's people - irrespective of ethnic race, religious past or worldly status - bound together by the Spirit of God in the one church of the body of Christ:

*You are all sons of God through faith in
Christ Jesus,*

*for all of you who were baptized into
Christ have clothed yourselves with
Christ.*

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave
nor free, male nor female, for you are
all one in Christ Jesus.*

*If you belong to Christ, then you are
Abraham's seed, and heirs according to
the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).*

Jesus is our "Savior, Christ the Lord" because as God's unique Son by divine conception he has fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. He is the true "seed of Abraham" and now he awaits the time in the future when "the mystery of God's will" which he "purposed in Christ" will reach its final fulfillment - "to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph. 1:9-10).

This is truly good news of great joy for all people!

Richie Temple

The Hopes and Fears of All the Years

by Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

There is a Christmas carol called, "O Little Town Of Bethlehem." The first verse is as follows:

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

The birth of Jesus Christ has brought to light the hopes and fears of all the years. When Jesus Christ was presented in the temple as a baby, an aged and godly man named Simeon prophesied that Jesus Christ was destined for the fall and rising of many, and that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed through him (Luke 2:34-35).

Through Jesus Christ, God is redeeming and saving and exalting mankind. And through Jesus Christ, God is also judging the world. The prophet Isaiah knew this.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (All scripture in NKJV):

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

In a prophecy concerning the Messiah, Isaiah declares that he will govern and judge and that he will be known among other things as the

"Prince of Peace." What a wonderful message we bring when we preach Christ, we speak of peace. The shepherds near Bethlehem heard of this peace too on the night that Jesus was born.

Luke 2:8-14

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

"And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Peace! Goodwill towards men! What a wonderful proclamation. Our hopes for joy, and life, and love and for peace, can now all be fulfilled through Jesus Christ. The word for "peace" here in Luke means a blessed wholeness. It is a peace that gives one a sense of total well being. This peace comes only to those who accept God's goodwill in Christ.

But not only are the world's hopes met in Jesus Christ, so are its greatest fears. The entrance of Jesus Christ into the world not only made peace available, it also brought a sword.

Matthew 10:32-34

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

"But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

The religious and sentimental view of Jesus Christ is that he came to fling peace around indiscriminately. Like fairy dust, a little sprinkle from the Savior and some happy and positive thoughts, and all will be well. But this is not true. This is a lie. We think of Jesus Christ as meek and mild, and he is to those who submit to his Lordship. But the Bible is clear that every knee shall bow before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:8-11

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

*that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow**, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,*

and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father [my emphasis].

Every knee shall bow before Christ, some in loving submission, some from force. The Scriptures not only show us a Christ who is gentle and who loves for children to sit on his lap, it also shows us a Christ who can be hot with anger, and who with whip in hand can drive the money changers from the temple!

The coming of Jesus Christ was not only to bring peace, but also judgment. People talk about the wonderful grace of God, but grace does not come cheap. The salvation we can receive comes through the cross of Christ. Our salvation cost God the death of His Son. We are saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of God. But conversely, rejection of the Savior renders a devastating verdict of condemnation.

Coming face to face with Jesus Christ can be a disturbing experience. Seeing him, you are confronted with the truth that without him you are doomed. Seeing him, we realize that none of our works can save us. Our only hope is in him. But many are too proud and arrogant to accept this verdict.

Matthew 11:20-24

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent:

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

"but I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.

"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

"But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

The final judgment of condemnation is not for sin, but for the rejection of the Savior from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. The people in these cities had seen Jesus Christ work, they had heard him preach God's Word, but they rejected him. They rejected God's goodwill that would have brought them peace.

I want you to notice in verse 23 the word "Hades." This word is also translated as hell. The world has many ideas about hell from a place of fire and brimstone, to a place where we relive all our sins throughout all eternity. But biblically hell - Hades, is used for the state of death.¹ It is the realm

¹Editor's note: as the author states the Greek word "Hades" refers to the realm of non-existence in the grave. Another Greek word "gehenna," also translated "hell," refers to the "second death" or the place of final "destruction" of the ungodly after the final judgment.

of the grave, **it is life extinguished**, non-existence. Do you know that the word "hell" or "Hades" is mentioned on more pages of the Bible than the word heaven itself? I came across this quote concerning what someone has said about hell.

The idea of hell was born of revenge and brutality on the one side, and cowardice on the other ... I have no respect for any human being who believes in it ... I dislike the doctrine, I hate it, I despise it, I defy this doctrine ...¹

The person who said this was Robert Ingersoll, one of the last century's great American philosophers and a foremost opponent of Christ and Christianity. Robert Ingersoll is dead and Robert Ingersoll has inherited hell [Hades]. He may have railed against it, rebelled against it, marched against it, protested against it, but he is in it. His life is extinguished and his future is simply total annihilation.

People today dislike the doctrine of hell, of eternal death, of judgment. But unless one accepts the Lord Jesus Christ, hell stands like a monolithic stone over the head of every living person. God does not delight in the death of wicked (Ezekial 18). He delights in showing mercy. In a sense God does not condemn people to extinction. People sentence themselves by their rejection of the Savior. As certain as is the love and mercy of God, so is the day of judgment.

Acts 10:34-43

*Then Peter opened his mouth and said:
"In truth I perceive that God shows no
partiality.*

*"But in every nation whoever fears Him
and works righteousness is accepted by
Him.*

*"The word which God sent to the
children of Israel, preaching peace
through Jesus Christ - He is Lord of all,*

*"that word you know, which was
proclaimed throughout all Judea, and*

*began from Galilee after the baptism
which John preached:*

*"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth
with the Holy Spirit and with power,
who went about doing good and healing
all who were oppressed by the devil, for
God was with Him.*

*"And we are witnesses of all things
which He did in the land of the Jews and
in Jerusalem, whom they killed by
hanging on a tree.*

*"Him God raised up on the third day,
and showed Him openly,*

*"not to all the people, but to witnesses
chosen before by God, even to us who
ate and drank with Him after He arose
from the dead.*

*"And he commanded us to preach to the
people and to testify that **it is He who
was ordained by God to be Judge of the
living and the dead.***

*"To Him all the prophets witness that,
through His name, whoever believes in
Him will receive remission of sins" [my
emphasis].*

Peter proclaimed as a part of the message about Christ, a day of judgment, a time when Christ will judge the living and the dead. No one will escape!

The apostle Paul proclaimed this same message of judgment, when he preached in Athens before the intellectual elite of that city.

Acts 17:22-31

*Then Paul stood in the midst of the
Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I
perceive that in all things you are very
religious;*

*for as I was passing through and
considering the objects of your worship,
I even found an altar with this
inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN
GOD.** Therefore, the One whom you
worship without knowing, Him I
proclaim to you:*

¹As quoted in *Hell You Say*, (Timothy Books, Newton, Pa., 1974), p. 7.

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.

"Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

"so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us

"for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are his offspring.'

"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

"because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" [my emphasis].

Life is not haphazard. It has a beginning and it will have an end. There are two destinies that await the choice of every man and woman. There comes a time when every man and woman needs to held face to face with the ultimate reality of the future. Like Scrooge, with the "Spirit of Christmas Future," people need to see what might be. But unlike Scrooge and his ghost, this is no work of fiction.

Romans 2:16 states that there is a day coming when God will judge the secrets of men by

Jesus Christ. So many people today do not like to hear this kind of preaching and teaching. They think it to be old fashioned, unloving and unkind. They say, "Life is tough. Give me something that will help us now." The Scriptures do provide help for the here and now. But what many people really want is a kind of spiritual morphine. If a doctor says you have a cancerous growth and it has to be cut out, is he unkind? If what the Scriptures say are true, and I believe they are, then to speak the truth about judgment is the most loving thing in the world. Wouldn't you want to be informed if you were in danger? Sure!

Our world does not like preaching on judgment because our world is sinful and selfish. We are too often like children who have been warned time and time again not to do a certain thing. Then when we are caught and we receive the consequences of our actions we think our parents are cruel. Children seldom if ever think of the great love the parent has in warning the child in the first place.

God is a God of love and justice. He does not just pronounce a judgment of condemnation. He says, "Look, here is where you are, you are doomed, but here is a way of escape." He says, "I have set before you life and death - choose life!" And we can choose life when we accept Christ. This will bring us peace.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

We can have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We can have the peace of reconciliation, of being one with God. We can have the peace of a cleared conscience, the peace of inner tranquillity that comes from knowing that you are God's child. We can have peace from the mental anguish that comes with the harsh realities of life.

Philippians 4:6-7

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

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

John 16:33

"These things I [Jesus Christ] have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The world will always be a whirlwind of confusion and turmoil as it rushes headlong to its final judgment. But for those who accept Christ there can be true peace. Jesus Christ has made peace a reality.

Colossians 1:19-20

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,

and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of the cross.

Peace in life comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. In him we are reconciled to God. The word "reconcile" in this verse means to cause a thorough change. Where there was no trust, there now is. Where there was no peace, there is now peace!

What the world offers as peace is only a temporary cessation of active war. But in the heart, war and fear still rage. The peace the world offers is no more satisfying than a cup of sand offered to a man dying of thirst. We all know in the depths of our hearts that politics, education, science, the arts, even religion leave us unfulfilled. Without Christ all these things are hollow and unsatisfying.

The heart hungers for something grand and noble and pure. The heart hungers for that which is good and satisfying. The heart hungers for peace and rest. But it is only found in Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and My burden is light."

This is not the peace and rest of inactivity. It is the rest of knowing that you are bound for an eternity of glory with God. It is the rest of a heart, that is in harmony with God's will. It is the rest of knowing and experiencing the full blessing of God. It is total satisfaction. It is eternal life.

John 6:35-40

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

"But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

When Jesus Christ was born in the town of Bethlehem almost 2000 years ago the hopes and fears of all the years came together in that manger where he lay.

There is another Christmas carol entitled "O Holy Night." The first verse reads:

O holy night the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of the dear Savior's birth;

Long lay the world in sin and error pinning, 'til he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world
rejoices, for yonder breaks a new
and glorious morn;

For those who accept the salvation offered
in Jesus Christ, the soul does for the first time feel its
worth! We realize that we are saved from sin and its
consequences, and that we are also saved to bear the
image of God. And our hearts thrill with hope,
knowing that each new day we can manifest the life
and power of God, and each new day brings us
closer to history's final moments.

2 Peter 4:11-13

*Therefore, since all these things will be
dissolved, what manner of persons
ought you to be in holy conduct and
godliness,*

*looking for and hastening the coming of
the day of God, because of which the
heavens will be dissolved, being on fire,
and the elements will melt with fervent
heat.*

*Nevertheless we, according to His
promise, look for new heavens and a
new earth in which righteousness
dwells.*

To those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ
the future is as bright as the promise of God. For
those who accept Christ as Lord and Savior there is
peace and rest even in the here and now. And we
look forward with great expectation to a new earth, a
new world, where there will be no more sorrow and
tears.

People speak of making their peace with
God. But there is no peace with God except that
which comes through the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed
are those who have Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

[This article is adapted by permission from Chuck
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and other books and tapes may be obtained by
writing to Chuck at the following address: Grace
Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL. 60645].

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What are "Eternal Life" and "Eternal Punishment"?

The Bible is clear that there are only two possible
final destinies for every person. The first is the gift
of "eternal life" while the second is called "eternal
punishment" (Matt. 25). The key to understanding
the *biblical* meaning of these terms is to grasp the
proper meaning of the Greek word "aionios" which
is usually translated into the English as "eternal".
Literally, the adjective "aionios" means "of," or
"pertaining to, the (coming) age." The word
"aionios" does not *of itself* mean "everlasting."
Instead, "it is a statement of 'quality' rather than
'duration' " (*New Bible Commentary*, p. 938, Note
34, IVP)

Following on this understanding of "aionios" the term
"eternal life" literally means "life of the coming age".
The "coming age" refers to the age of the kingdom of
God which will be established in a renewed earth after
Christ's second coming (I Cor. 15:50). Some of the
qualities of the life of this coming age are "glory, honor,
and immortality" (Rom. 2:7-10). Since the coming age of
the kingdom of God will "never end" (Luke 1:33) and
since those who *live* within it will have the quality of
"immortality" (i.e. deathlessness), eternal life is also
"everlasting" life.

However, when it comes to the fate of the ungodly it must
be recognized that the term "eternal punishment" does not
include the qualities of "life" or "immortality." Instead, it
is simply "punishment pertaining to the coming age."
This punishment will be according to one's deeds and will
culminate in a final destruction (II Thess. 1:9) of being
"burned up" like chaff. There is simply no NT basis for
the idea that "eternal punishment" is everlasting torment
in hell

[For more information on final punishment see the
excellent book *The Fire that Consumes* by Edward
Fudge, Providential Press

The "Mystery" of the Cross of Christ

by Daniel J. Mahar

East Hampton, Connecticut

The "mystery" which was revealed by God to the Apostle Paul forms the heart of the gospel which Paul preached. Any serious discussion about this "mystery" should begin with the cross of Christ. To Paul, the message of the cross was powerful, for it was at the cross where Jesus Christ established the basis for the "mystery" or "secret administration." This may be confirmed through an examination of those key passages in Paul's letters where the "mystery" is discussed:

Eph. 2:13-3:6

But now you who were sometimes afar off were made near by the blood of Christ ... having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in dogmas; in order to create in Himself of both [Jew and Gentile] one new humanity, so making peace ...

For this cause ... if you have heard of the administration of the grace of God ... How by revelation He made known to me a mystery ...

That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.

Col. 1:20-27

And, having made peace by the blood of His cross ... to reconcile all things to Himself ... whether things in earth, or things in heaven ...

I am made a minister, according to the administration of God ... Even the mystery, which had been hid from eons and from generations, but is now made manifest to His saints;

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory ...

Col. 2:14-15 (Moffatt)

He canceled the regulations which stood against us - all these obligations He set aside when He nailed them to the cross, when He cut away the Angelic Rulers and Powers from us, exposing them to all the world and triumphing over them in the cross.

I Cor. 2:6-8

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the eons unto our glory; Which none of the Princes of the eon knew, for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The accomplishments of Christ at the cross are those which comprise the mystery. We may glean from the above quoted passages at least three major points:

1. The old testament (covenant) was "done away" or "abolished" along with the rules, rituals and dogmas contained in the Mosaic Law.

2. The authority of angelic powers was abolished: a condition pertaining not only to demonic powers, but to all angelic authorities including those angelic classes which exercised their control in the old testament.

3. The grounds for a "new humanity" were established: the "new creation" of the spiritual "body of Christ," wherein all members have peace and open access with God as their Father, and are all equal members regardless of race, gender or social status.

The first point is held by most Christians at various stages; few would argue that the old testament was in some sense "done away" or "abrogated" by Jesus Christ; many assert that the old testament was actually "postponed" or "put in abeyance," but Paul was very insistent that it was "abolished." Although Paul stated that the old testament was useful "for our learning" (I Cor. 10:11), he nonetheless characterized it as a

"dispensation" of "death" and "condemnation" (2 Cor. 3:7,9).

The second point in regard to the abolishment of angelic authorities will perhaps prove most difficult for many to digest in regard to what we have been accustomed to believe about the spirit world being categorically divided between evil "demons" and purely-good "angels." Nowadays, "angels" are commonly thought to be synonymous with "good spirits." But Paul and other writers of his time did not think this way. While the perception of demons as thoroughly evil held true for Paul as for us, the idea that "all" angels were "good" did not, because assorted classes of angels (outside of demons) were regarded as antagonistic as well. As T. Johnson states, "In the world view of early Christian and other first century writers, there were many supernatural spirits to contend with, good and evil angels, demonic powers, and a host of invisible spirits variously named (e.g. Rom. 8:38; Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15; Heb. 1:4, 14)."¹

A clear connection can be seen between the rules, rituals and dogmas contained in the old testament and the "Angelic Rulers and Powers" defeated at the cross (Col. 2:14-15), because when the old testament was "done away," the authority of these angelic powers went with it. What then was that connection? First, both Paul in Gal. 3:19 and Stephen in Acts 7:53 proclaimed that the Law was "ordained," "prescribed," or "delivered" by angels. It is clear then that angels played a very active role at the formation and transmission of the OT legislation to Israel.

Secondly, Paul also stated that such regulations contained in the old testament pertaining to "days, months, times, and years" (Gal. 4:10) and "in respect to meat ... drink ... holy days ... new moons ... and Sabbaths" (Col. 2:16) were according to the "elemental spirits of the world" (Gal. 4:3,9; Col. 2:8, 20 - Moffatt, RSV, NEB and TEV).

The "elements" was another title used by Paul to signify angelic beings, alluded to as such because these angels governed the forces of nature and employed such natural forces as fire, water,

earth and air to prescribe penalties upon those who transgressed their laws (Heb. 2:2). Their activity becomes noticeable through the numerous catastrophes which befell sinners throughout the old testament, and is recognizable in Rev. 16:2-12. These same angels prescribed the "holy days" and "sabbaths," and also functioned as "guardians and administrators" which kept people in bondage under the Law until Christ came (Gal. 3:23; 4:2) and provided us freedom from their authority.

According to the Dead Sea Scrolls, angelic hosts were also the "holy spirits" which endowed the leaders of the congregation with "knowledge" along with other spiritual manifestations and participation with these angelic spirits of "knowledge" was zealously sought;² even the "comforter" (Paraclete) in the Gospel of John was a title widely used of angels who functioned as mediators and advocates on behalf of the elect, though Jesus in the Gospel of John re-adapted this term to pertain to the gift of holy spirit which He would send.³ It is significant that the spirit of Christ residing in every believer carries out the same functions previously performed by angels and empowers every believer with several spiritual abilities and manifestations, thus ending the need for dependence upon angels for access to God, spiritual empowerments and the resultant benefits.

A major problem perceived by Paul with the "Judaisms" of his day (regardless of whether this was always a problem, or one which later developed), was that of "angel worship" (Col. 2:19), for people were enslaved to those "called gods" (I Cor. 8:5), but "who by nature, are not gods" (Gal. 4:8). The extent of "angel worship" is witnessed from the writings of that era, and may be discerned from the Dead Sea Scrolls, as in the writing, "The Messianic Rule" (IQSa 2:3-10):

"No man smitten with any human uncleanness shall enter the assembly of God ... No man smitten in his flesh, or paralysed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish ... for the Angels of Holiness

¹T. Johnson, p. 94, *New International Biblical Commentary*, , *Letters of 1,2,3 John*, v.17 (Hendrickson, 1993).

²E. Earle Ellis, "Spiritual' Gifts in the Pauline Community," pp. 128-144, NTS 20, 1974.

³E. Schillebeeckx, p. 423f, *Christ* (Crossroad, 1983).

are [with] their [congregation], for he is smitten."¹

Herein we are brought to our third point concerning the "new humanity" and of its necessity in relation to the abolishment of the old testament and the authority of angelic authorities. In contrast to Qumran, where people were turned away out of reverence for the "angels of holiness," Jesus turned away no one, and lovingly embraced the "rejectees"

... But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed ... (Luke 14:12-21):

The Gospels are filled with many examples of Jesus reaching out to the "blind," the "dumb," the "lame" and so on, and delivering them of their afflictions.

But not only did the Old Testament system magnify enmity between God and humanity, it also engendered "enmity" between human beings on the grounds of race, gender and social standing in addition to those ailments listed above. But this "enmity" was destroyed at the cross of Christ:

... having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in dogmas; for to create in Himself of both [Jew and Gentile] one new humanity, so making peace;

And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross ... (Eph. 2:15-16).

In the body of Christ,

there is no Jew, nor yet Gentile, there is no slave nor yet free, there is no male and female (Gal. 3:28);

From now on, "we are acquainted with no one according to the flesh" for everyone, "in Christ is a new creation" (II Cor. 5:16-17). Through the one spirit of Christ we now enjoy open access to the Father (Eph. 2:18). We have been "sealed with the holy spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:14), bestowed to us freely by God's grace and making each one of us a member of God's family:

¹G. Vermes, p. 102, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Penguin, 1987). See also *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 261-267, edited by J.H. Charlesworth (Doubleday, 1992).

Consequently, then, no longer are you strangers and foreigners, but you are joint-citizens of the saints and belong to God's family,

being built up on the foundation of ... Jesus Christ himself,

in whom the entire building, being connected together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;

in Whom you, also, are being built together for God's dwelling place, in spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

On this behalf I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you, the nations,

since you surely hear of the administration (gr. oikonomia) of the grace of God that is given to me for you,

that by revelation the secret [mystery] is made known to me ... (Eph. 3:1-3).

The word "administration" (gr. oikonomia) literally means "home-rule" or the "rule" or "reign" of a household. The administration spoken of in Eph. 3:3 is the "home-rule" of God's family referred to in Ephesians 2:19ff. Scholars often speak of the different Jewish sects in the first century as "home rule" parties (i.e. Pharisees, Saducees, etc.),² each possessing their own ideas as to how a theocracy should be run. However, God's "administration" established through Christ may best be understood as being the "family" that it is, rather than a political, governmental structure. In reality, God is our Father, and we are His children.

L.B. Paton noted that the "fundamental fact" and "foundation" upon which Jesus based His gospel was the "Fatherhood of God" as attested by Jesus' continual addressing God as "Father" throughout the Gospels. While this title is used in the Old Testament, Jesus advanced to this "a new meaning both extensively and intensively" going "well beyond the teaching of the Old Testament" in magnifying that "parental love of God toward His

²M. Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, pp. 68, 113, etc. (Harper & Brothers, 1938).

For a good introduction on the "Elements" see Ernest Martin's booklet "Angelic Powers and the Law of Moses" (ASK Pub., Portland, Oregon, 1989).

children" with a love that transcended "the limits of race" and extends to whole world (cf. John 3:16).¹

God's very heart was brilliantly expressed through Jesus Christ and in contrast to the fiery swords, condemnations and judgments which were to accompany the expected Messiah, Jesus Christ came dispensing love, grace and truth. Because of that both angels and men had Him crucified. And yet even after that Christ forgave them while hanging from the cross! Christ responded to hatred with love. The message of the cross is indeed powerful, of which there is no need to be ashamed.

In conclusion, the "mystery" is a lot more than a "gap" in God's chronological plan as often portrayed in colorful dispensationalist charts. The "mystery" is God's "secret will" which He "purposed in Christ" - to have an "administration of the complement of the eras," of which God has appointed His Son as the "Head" - through which to reconcile all those in heaven and earth to himself (Eph. 1:9-11).

As Christian believers, members of the body of Christ, we have been entrusted with the "service of reconciliation" and are emissaries for Christ to proclaim this "good news" to humans and before angels (2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 3:10). The "cross of Christ" may be considered our "spiritual declaration of independence" because the work of Christ resulted in true "liberty" (cf. 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1). In a dying world where wars, strifes and slaveries abound on account of fleshly and religious differences, the "mystery" of the cross of Christ is just as relevant and urgently needed today as it was almost two thousand years ago.

[Daniel Mahar is currently translating into English a German work on the subject of angels].

Walking in the Light

by Scot Hahn

Raleigh, North Carolina

The Christian lifestyle of walking in the light is set forth in many places in the New Testament Letters. One very important section is in I John:

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (I John 1:5-7).

In these verses we see two opposing ways of living: in the light or in darkness. If we are to walk in fellowship with God as his children and with our brothers and sisters in Christ then we must walk in the light. It is not an "optional extra" - it is the Christ-like life of the believer..

There are many verses which help show us how to live this way. In Ephesians 5:1-2 we see that we are to be imitators of God, who is light. We do this by following the example of Christ, who was the perfect revelation of God and who fully carried out God's will. Christ's life was light and love and this is how we are to live. All of the specific practical ways of living a life of love flow directly from our imitation of Christ in day to day living.

We all have faults and frailties in our lives. Only by each of us endeavoring to overlook those in others and then loving each other "as Christ loved us" are we able to have unity within the body of Christ and grow together. Understanding and living these simple truths is the *only* basis for our fellowship with God and each other. This is walking in the light.

[Scot and Kristi Hahn have a home Bible-fellowship in Raleigh, N.C.)

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¹L.B. Paton, *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, pp. 290-291 (Macmillan, 1921).

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Notes & Quotes on the Bible

Itching Ears

There are few things more destructive to the development of a godly Christian life than the promotion of rumors, speculations, myths or lies. Time and time again in history rumors, lies or seemingly harmless speculations have led to gross perversions of Christian principles and many times to the destruction of lives on a mass scale. The truth is not something to be played with according to one's own changing preferences and tastes. It is something to be sought for honestly, upheld bravely and promulgated in humility. Paul spoke directly to this need to search out and jealously guard the truth:

*Do your best to present yourself to God
as one approved, a workman who does
not need to be ashamed and who
correctly handles the word of truth
(II Tim. 2:15).*

Although this verse is very familiar to many people in the fundamentalist and evangelical traditions (usually in its KJV form "rightly-dividing the word of truth") not all seem to realize the incredible harm and injury that can be done by not strictly adhering to it as a principle. If there is one thing above all else that should be a fundamental principle of biblical study (and biblical application!) it is *honesty tempered with humility*. Over the centuries literally millions of people's lives have been affected by erroneous teaching and often times vicious applications of biblical "truth." This has been true not only within the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions but also in the Protestant churches of the reformation and the many denominations and groupings that have sprung from them down to this century. The massacres of the crusades, the tortures of the inquisition, the countless pogroms of the Jews throughout history, the fascism of Nazi propaganda and South African apartheid have all sought support for their philosophies and actions in the pages of scripture. Anyone who doubts that such a thing still exists need look no farther than the wholesale "ethnic cleansing" performed by "Christian" ethnic groups in the

former Yugoslavia as well as similar situations in regional wars of the former Soviet Union. In each of these cases appeal is made to a scriptural basis for fanatical beliefs held and murderous actions perpetrated.

Today, as throughout the last two thousand years, the Christian world abounds in conspiracy theories and apocalyptic scenarios revolving around the second coming of Christ. Often these scenarios come complete with date-setting (e.g. a well known international cable news station proclaims 2007 as the "probable" date) in direct contradiction of plain and obvious statements by Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7).

Each of the many authors, preachers or groups who take such positions claim to see the fulfillment of predicted biblical "end-time" signs in the current events of today. Apparently this is done in ignorance (or disparagement) of the fact that generation upon generation of other Christian believers have done the very same thing in almost every century since the time of Christ - only to be disappointed - sometimes with devastating mental, emotional, spiritual, material or even physical consequences to themselves or to others.

Let it be plainly said: Christian believers, especially leaders, have a grave responsibility before God to live lives that are "self-controlled, upright and godly in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope ... " (Titus 2:12-13). Each of us will one day "give account of ourselves to God" and this "accounting" will include, among other things, "every idle word" we may speak (Rom. 14:12; Matt. 12:36). The qualities of self-control, uprightness and godliness should be in our *thinking*, our *actions* and our *speech*. We, of all people, should not be "blown here and there" (Eph. 4:14-15) by the latest "prophecy, report or letter" promoting the idea "that the day of the Lord is at hand" (2 Thess. 2:1-2). Nor should we allow ourselves to "deceived" by other "distortions of truth" (Acts 20:30-31) concerning *any matter* - especially when *authority is claimed* on the basis of special "spiritual insight," "revelation," "Jesus," or "an angel, told me," or like unproveable sources (I Thess. 5:21-22).

The Apostle Paul showed great concern about the harm to people's lives caused by such speculations, distortions and erroneous teachings. In speaking to Timothy he commanded:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work - which is by faith (1 Tim. 1:3-4)

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

Obviously, there is a grave responsibility for those who teach the scriptures to accurately present "the word of truth" to others. There is also a responsibility to do this with humility and with a sincere willingness to change when one finds that one is wrong - in part or in whole. But perhaps, above all, we must all learn to *separate speculation from solid biblical evidence* and to designate speculation clearly as such. We should also be willing to honestly say we don't know the answer to certain sections of scripture and to present our understanding of particular topics as "possibilities" rather than "certainties" in areas of disagreement or uncertainty. In short, we need to follow the Bereans' example and "to search the scriptures to see if these things are so" - no matter who teaches them (Acts 17:11). If the Bereans were right to do this with what the great apostle Paul taught should you or I be offended when people do the same with what we teach or write?! The answer is, of course, obvious.

When Will the Kingdom Come?

Any discussion of the timing of the second coming of Christ must keep firmly in mind that from the biblical perspective, God's coming kingdom has *already* been inaugurated by the first coming of Christ and by the giving of the "firstfruits of the Spirit" to every believer in Christ (Rom. 14:17). From the biblical perspective the whole period of time (however long it may prove to be) from Christ's resurrection and the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost until his future return is "the last days" (Acts 2:17; cf. I Cor. 10:11). During this time of "the last days" Christian believers have a clear mission which should govern their thoughts, words and deeds:

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 on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:7-8).

However long or however short the time may prove to be before our Lord's return the Christian mission and responsibility is the same. It is not altered by world events of a religious, political, economic or cosmic nature (nor, I might add, does expertise in the Bible automatically make one an "instant expert" in such fields as history, economics, politics, etc.). Instead, the mission and responsibility of the church is *always* the same because this time period is, in a very special sense, the "day of salvation" - the time when the salvation accomplished through Christ's first coming is now being offered to the world. For those who accept this salvation the blessings of God's future kingdom have *already* begun!

E. Earle Edwards speaks directly to this issue in his book *Pauline Theology* (Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 5-14:

The Old Testament prophets predicted the "last" days or latter days in which God would accomplish the final redemption of his people and the destruction of their enemies. Later "apocalyptic" writings emphasized that this last or "eschatological" redemption would be "revealed" by God at his sovereign pleasure and would encompass not only the nation but the whole created order. They interpreted the redemption in terms of both a

continuity and a catastrophic discontinuity between the present age and the new cosmic creation, that is, the coming age of the kingdom of God ...

In the teaching of Jesus the arrival of the kingdom is said to take place in two stages. The first had already appeared in his ministry and was to be revealed shortly [with the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost] in an even greater degree in the midst of the present age. The second stage, the arrival of the kingdom in universal judgment and final redemption, was reserved for Jesus' future second coming, his parousia as the glorious Son of man.

The coming of the kingdom of God in the resurrection of Jesus and in the activity of the Holy Spirit in the church *effectively diminished the importance of the precise time of its final consummation*. While the "delay of the parousia" was a problem for early twentieth century Christian scholars, there is little if any evidence that it was a significant problem for the early church. From the beginning Paul considered the parousia expectation to be equally relevant for believers who were alive and for those who had fallen asleep in death ...

In Pauline perspective, the transition from death to resurrection is equivalent to the transition from non-being to being (Rom. 4:17); thus, for the unconscious dead the parousia of Jesus Christ is immediately imminent, only one moment into the future, and thus for the living that moment is never very far (chronologically!) into the future. Living in the imminence of Christ's return is, therefore, the privilege and the proper stance toward life of every generation of Christians.

Who is "Spiritual"? Who is "Greatest"?

Who then is "spiritual" or who is "greatest" in the kingdom of God? Is it those who have attained to some deep spiritual "wisdom" or "insight"? Is it those who have finally unlocked the mysteries of angels, spiritual manifestations or the spiritual world? The biblical answer to this question is plain through-out the New Testament. Jesus himself stated it in the simplest of terms in response to the request of James and John to sit at his right and left hand in the glory of his kingdom.

...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of man did not

come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

It is clear from such statements that when the Bible speaks of the "mature" or the "grown-up" amongst Christians it is speaking primarily of those Christian believers whose lives reflect a humble and selfless life of Christ-like love and service to others. It is *not* speaking of those who are supposedly "initiated" into some deep, hidden secrets that only the "super-spiritual" can understand. This is confirmed in I Corinthians 3:1-4:

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not yet ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul, and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not men?

Paul is speaking here to Christians - people who have the Spirit of God and who, indeed, are "the temple of the holy Spirit" which dwells in them (I Cor. 6:19). And yet he uses the adjective "spiritual" not to describe those who are tapped into hidden spiritual secrets or those who are "experts" in spiritual manifestations. Instead, he addresses as "spiritual" those Christian believers who by virtue of disciplined renewed mind living have cultivated and produced the "fruit of the Spirit" in their lives. The spiritually "mature" in Christ are the same as the "greatest" in the kingdom of God - they are the ones who like Christ "take up their cross daily," laying down their lives as "a living sacrifice" in the light of spreading and living the gospel message (Rom. 12:1-2).

It was in interaction with this Corinthian church that Paul confronted a group of believers who thought that they were indeed "super-spiritual" - so much so that G.E. Ladd says they "claimed access to a wisdom that secured a perfected salvation ... and a quality spirituality ... that led to utter indifference to the flesh." As Ladd continues:

This esoteric knowledge led to a haughty indifference to the scruples of the unenlightened (I Cor. 8:1). The

deliverance from the flesh expressed itself in two different ways, both by indulgence and denial. "All things are lawful to me" (I Cor. 6:12) expressed the freedom of these pneumatikoi ["spirituals"]; and, as the context clearly shows, this freedom was understood to allow unhampered indulgence of bodily appetites, including sexual abuses...

But Paul would entertain no such "spirituality." For him the message of the cross was the supreme wisdom of God. To understand its meaning and significance was to understand "the wisdom of God in a mystery." There was no "higher truth" beyond

that. In short, in the NT the "spiritual" or the "mature" are

not an esoteric circle initiated into special inner secrets of spiritual truth; they are simply mature believers who understand the meaning of the cross and live consistently with this truth ... (A *Theology of the NT*, p. 422-423).

[For an excellent study of these subjects I highly recommend Gordon Fee's *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament* series published by Eerdmans].

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