
The Unity of the Spirit

Vol. 2 Issue 2

"In the Bond of Peace"

Summer 1996

A Newsletter of the Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.



Dear Fellow-Believers,

In the Bible there is one God and one people of God - the people of faith. This concept of a unique "people of God" comes clearly into focus in the Old Testament with the promises God made to "Abraham and his seed" (Gal. 3:16). It then continues throughout the Bible so as to bind the Old and New Testaments together as one continuous story - a story of Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfillment. This continuity is plainly set forth throughout the New Testament and is seen in quotations of Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled "in Christ:"

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (II Cor. 1:20-22).

The new covenant church of the body of Christ, which came into existence on the day of Pentecost, saw itself in direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God. In short, through faith in Christ and their incorporation via the Spirit "into Christ" the new covenant believers saw themselves as the true "seed of Abraham" and heirs of all the promises of God to his covenant people. This theme is set forth in Paul's letter to the Galatians:

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).

Through the Spirit the first century believers were "children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:16-17). God's gift of holy Spirit was understood by them to be the "firstfruits" (Rom. 8:23) or "first-installment" (Eph. 1:13-14) of God's future inheritance for his people. Through the Spirit the blessings of God's future kingdom, as prophesied in the Old Testament and announced by Christ himself, had already broken into this present evil age. Therefore, both the "last days" of the present evil age and the future blessings of the glorious "age to come" had already begun. Because of this the first century believers saw themselves as those "upon whom the fulfillment of the ages had come" (I Cor. 10:11). What had been foreshadowed in the Old Testament events, law, temple and sacrificial system had now found its "substance" or "reality" in Christ (Col. 2:17). The following section of scripture illustrates this understanding of fulfillment in the NT church:

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.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:18-22).

The physical building of the Old Testament temple could never be a permanent place for God's dwelling because "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by men" (Acts 7:48). But what had been foreshadowed by the OT temple had now found its greater "reality" or "fulfillment" in Christ. The New Testament people of God had become "a spiritual house" or "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Such language of NT fulfillment of the Old Testament "shadow" is everywhere on the pages of the NT epistles as well as in the Book of Acts. It was precisely this unique understanding of the first century believers as the NT "people of God" that gave them their revolutionary perspective on all of life. "Already" they were the children of God possessing the firstfruits of their future inheritance but "not yet" had they received that inheritance in full. They were a people living "between the times" of Christ's first and second comings. The letter of I John illustrates this perspective:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (I John 3:1-2).

As the children of God within the societies of our own day we also should reflect the qualities of our status as God's new covenant people and bring others into the royal heritage of God's family. The letter of I Peter sums up this unique perspective of fulfillment:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, the living Stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him

you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"

and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message - which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God ... (I Pet 2:1-10).

Richie Temple

The Fullness of the Blessing of the Gospel of Christ

by Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

It may seem foolish to state this, but Jesus Christ is fundamental and central to Christianity. Christianity is not about principles and programs, it is about a person. It is not about theories, it is about reality. It is not just about adopting a new value system, it is about having life or not having it. In the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ states,

John 10:10 (all verses from NKJV)

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

In the epistle of I John, the apostle writes,

I John 5:12

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

And again in the letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul writes,

Colossians 3:3-4

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

According to the Word of God only those who have Jesus Christ have life. And the excellency of our life now, as Christians, depends on the clear understanding of our identification and total union with Christ. We need to fully understand and then build on the life we have through, in and with him. Indeed, our heavenly Father's goal, is that we be like Christ.

Romans 8:29

For whom He (God) foreknew [i.e. the Christian believer], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Christ] might be the firstborn among many brethren.

C.S. Lewis, an English author, wrote a satire on Christianity called *The Screwtape Letters*. In the book there are letters from a devil spirit named "Screwtape" to his apprentice devil spirit named "Wormwood." Wormwood is trying to keep the Christian he is assigned to from really living in all the fullness and sufficiency he has in Christ. Trying to help out, Screwtape writes the following to his apprentice:

My dear Wormwood,

What we want, if men become Christian at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call, "Christianity And." You know - "Christianity and the Crisis," or "Christianity and the New Psychology," or "Christianity and the New Order" or "Christianity and Vegetarianism," or "Christianity and Spelling Reform." If they must be Christian let them be "Christians" with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian coloring.

Even though *The Screwtape Letters* is a fictional work, it shows us why many Christians experience an anemic Christian life. It explains why there is so little true power and joy in the lives of far too many children of God. It also explains why the world really doesn't see the church as having viable and relevant truth to present in the great market place of ideas. After all why should the world accept Christ, if the church so freely buys into all that the world offers?

Many of us are being tricked into thinking that we need something more in addition to Christ. We are being told that we need to adorn the gospel of Christ with bells and whistles. We need Christ and business principles, or Christ and the new theories from sociology and psychology. We are being told that we need to wrap up the gospel in some new clothes in order to make it appealing to our age. But all the things we can add to Christianity, can only in the end, dilute the power of the pure gospel of Christ. Look at what the apostle Paul writes near the end of his letter to the Romans.

Romans 15:29

But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

Look again at the words that Paul uses, by divine revelation, when pointing to Christ. He

speaks of "fullness," "blessing" and the "gospel," which literally means "good news!"

Paul wasn't bringing to Rome principles for profitable living. He wasn't going to bring pious platitudes for the Pharisees among them. He wasn't bringing academic rhetoric and theory. He wasn't going to bring a new marketing strategy for growing the church, or a new sociological or psychological study that would really make their marriages great. Paul was going to Rome, and he was bringing "the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." He was bringing good news that could truly change people and provide all they needed for their new life!

In the book of Revelation, chapter 1 and in verse 11, Jesus Christ calls himself, "the Alpha and the Omega." This means that he is the first and the last. In our vernacular today we would say that Christ is everything from "A to Z." He is simply everything we need in life.

This world of ours is filled with real needs and stubborn problems. We are riddled with crime. We have racial, social and family strife. We have financial problems, emotional problems. Our world is full of sinful behavior. Where does the solution lie? We've tried more laws and more education. We've spent billions of dollars. The only real solution is in the knowledge of God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and then to let this knowledge make its impact on our lives.

2 Peter 1:2-4

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord,

as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,

by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

In the exceedingly great and precious promises in God's Word, we have given to us in Christ Jesus everything we need for life and godliness. We have everything we need to be healed physically, emotionally and spiritually. In the knowledge of

God and of Christ, grace and peace is multiplied to us. As we grow in our knowledge of what we have and who we are, and what we can do through Jesus Christ, we can experience greater grace and peace. We can live with confidence, manifesting more of his character in our lives.

And we are given the power to escape the "corruption" that is in the world, a corruption driven by lust. Literally, the "corruption" refers to the influence of a huckster. The huckster is someone involved in deceitful dealings to make a dishonest gain. He is a fraud and what he is selling is fake. It seems like everyone today wants to sell you some new and improved philosophy or psychology, or religion. But all they really want to do is to make money off of you! But when you come to Christ, you come to someone who gave his life for you. You come to one who heals, who delivers, to a Savior who gives true wisdom and power.

No wonder Satan would have us grasping for every new idea, every new program, rather than learning about Jesus Christ and who we are and what we can do in and through and with him. Don't think for a moment that a thorough and practical knowledge of Jesus Christ is irrelevant to today's demands on your life. The message of the cross, of our redemption and new life in Christ has not played itself out. The gospel has not lost any of its vitality. It may be an old, old story, but it has the power to change your life.

Romans 1:15-16

So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also the Greek.

The gospel of Christ has in it the power to make our lives whole and complete. The gospel is the power of God to deliver us from bondage, to heal, to forgive. The gospel of Christ is the very power of God!

I Corinthians 1:18

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

To some the message of the cross is foolishness. But to others it is the power of God. And what is the message of the cross? The message of the cross is that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. The message of the cross is that when Christ was buried, our old sinful nature was buried with him. And the message of the cross is that when Christ was raised from the dead, we too were given newness of life in him!

Romans 6:3-4

Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

When believers are baptized into Christ they are immersed in him. Being immersed in him we are inextricably linked together, united for all eternity. Being united with him by the glorious power of God, we are able to live differently, to become victors rather than victims. As Christians united to Christ in his death and burial and resurrection, we have the right and the privilege, and the power to change for the better.

Going back to I Corinthians we read,

I Corinthians 1:18-25

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;

but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

We must say it again. Christ is the power and the wisdom of God. He is our all and all. He is all we ever need. Though it may sound foolish that because a man was crucified and buried and raised from the dead almost 2000 years ago, your life can be different, it is nonetheless true.

There are those who seek after "wisdom" - some fashionable idea, some modern method, some new program. There are those who seek after a "sign" - some spiritual phenomenon. But true wisdom and true power are found in Christ alone. In Jesus Christ we have what the world could never provide by logic or showmanship, we have the supernatural and miraculous wisdom and power of God!

I Corinthians 1:26-31

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

and the base things of the world and the and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

that no flesh should glory in His presence.

*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us **wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -***

that, as it is written,

"He who glories, let him glory in the LORD"
[my emphasis].

It is in Christ that we have true wisdom, the insight for living. Our guilt is gone before God. With righteousness we stand before God holy and without blame, and we have boldness to approach the throne of God with assurance. Christ is made unto us sanctification, separating us from a corrupt and corrupting world. In our sanctification in Christ we are given to God as His inheritance, made saints and destined for glory.

With Christ we have redemption. We are freed from every form of bondage whether spiritual, physical or emotional. With Christ we have all that we need for life and godliness. With Christ we can not only come to grips with the affairs of life, we can overcome the world (I John 5:4-5)! The truths of who we are and what we can do in Christ are more relevant to the present world scene than any new psychology or self help group.

Colossians 2:6-10

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,

rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our total sufficiency! We need to believe it in the depths of our hearts and then act on it. The greatest danger to the Christian believer comes from not being rooted and grounded in Christ. Satan will always try to deceive us to think that we need more than the Lord. But we must not allow anyone or anything to rob us of our total completeness in him.

There is nothing lacking in our life when we have Christ. We lack neither purpose in life, nor the power to live life more abundantly. In our Lord Jesus Christ dwells all the fullness of God and we are absolutely complete in him! He is our life!

Because of Christ we can be free from worry and fear, from the anxieties that eat away at so many people today. We can be free from the emptiness and the restlessness that permeates our world.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come unto 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.

To those who struggle with intellectual doubt, the Lord simply says come and find your rest. In him alone is to be found real and solid quietness of heart and dignity of person. To those who are ignorant of "the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ," the invitation is, "come!"

[This article is adapted, with permission, from a book by Chuck LaMattina entitled *Christ Our Life*. This book and two others, *Our Awesome God* and *Essential Matters*, may be ordered for \$5 each from: Grace Ministry USA, 7359 North Hoyne, Chicago, Illinois 60645. They are all highly recommended as practical and inspirational helps in learning and applying the truth of the Bible].

**

The Meaning of Communion

by Mark Mattison

Kentwood, Michigan

"This do in remembrance of me." With these words ringing in our ears, we celebrate communion all over the church of God. As we drink the cup and eat the bread, we reflect on Christ's sacrifice and look forward to his return.

Yet communion is more than a memorial. Our continued participation in this powerfully symbolic ceremony molds our thinking and brings to life deeply spiritual truths in very concrete ways. It shapes our identity as a people of God and provides the truly blessed assurance that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The "message" of communion is important and deserves our full attention.

An Unworthy Manner?

From what has been said, it follows that believers should share communion at every reasonable opportunity. Yet, often believers abstain from sharing in this rich experience. They allow the bread and the cup to pass them by as they sit in guilt and shame, wishing they were more worthy. There was a time when I myself would abstain if I were struggling with some sin.

What is it that drives believers from their Lord's table in these spiritually intimate moments? This practice stems from Paul's warning in I Corinthians 11:27-32. There Paul tells us to examine ourselves before communing, for "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27, NIV). Participating "in an unworthy manner" brings judgment (vv. 29-31), and none of us wishes to transgress this command. Therefore, we examine ourselves before participating, seeing how well we "measure up." If we feel spiritual enough, we may proceed; if we don't, better "safe than sorry."

But is this really Paul's meaning? Was this Jesus' meaning? Consider Jesus' words in John 6:

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink the blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (vv. 53-56, NIV)

Consider further the fact that Jesus' blood *cleanses* us from sin. When we are guilty, that is when we need Jesus the most. When we are struggling, that is when we need the help and support of the body. We need to be reminded that we are in a fellowship of brothers and sisters who represent Jesus to us, and we need the strength and assurance provided by the communion celebration. To shrink away from it is to retreat within ourselves and suffer silently.

What, then did Paul mean in I Corinthians? Consider the context. The Corinthian believers were abusing the Lord's Supper:

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you

goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! (vv. 20-22, NIV).

The Corinthians' behavior contradicted the whole point of the communion experience. Rather than celebrating their unity, they were revealing their division. Hence Paul's question, "Do you despise the church of God?" They were eating and drinking "without recognizing the body of the Lord" (v. 30), that is, the body of Christ of which they were part. As such, they were eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner" and bringing judgment on themselves. The "unworthy manner" relates to the way they abused the Lord's Supper. This observation is confirmed by verses 33 and 34:

"So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment" (vv. 33, 34, NIV).

When we struggle with sin and find ourselves in need of forgiveness, let us eagerly seek that forgiveness and eagerly reach for the cleansing blood of Christ. "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?" (I Cor. 10:16a, NIV). Let us share the communion experience and the reassurance that we are part of God's people. "Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (I Cor. 10:16b, NIV).

Participation in the Body

This message is one of hope and comfort, but it is also one of warning. Paul directs our attention to the body and asks us to examine ourselves. Are we communing *as a body*? Right relationships within the body are essential. Jesus taught that this aspect of church life is to take precedence over worship (cf. Matt. 5:23, 24).

Communion is not an individualistic matter; it is a *body* matter. We commune as a body; we come to the Lord's table as a family. This truth is bound up in the biblical symbol of the one loaf and the one cup. "Because there is one loaf," Paul writes, "we,

who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (I Cor. 10:17, NIV).

The New Testament Christians celebrated communion by sharing a single cup and a single loaf of bread as a visible sign of their unity (I Cor. 10:17). In this they followed the pattern of Jesus and his disciples at the first Lord's Supper (Mark 14:22,23). Without this symbol, it is easy to forget the communal nature of this important ceremony.

The next time your church celebrates communion, take a look around the room and consider the brothers and sisters with whom you are communing. Evaluate your relationships with them. Do you despise the church of God? Consider how to put an end to unresolved conflicts. Do you recognize the body of the Lord? If so, commune with thanksgiving. Are you struggling with sin? Drink deeply of the cup of forgiveness.

[Mark Mattison is editor of the *Christian Perspectives* newsletter and helps co-ordinate a home Bible fellowship in Kentwood, MI].

**

Teaching Our Children

by Della Waite

Wendell, North Carolina

One of my greatest joys this last week has been to watch my two year old, Mathew, "the clutcher." A clutcher is one who chooses an item and holds it tightly during most waking moments. My joy came from seeing him choose a Bible, clutch it tightly, and hold it closely to his heart. Many times I saw him sitting and "reading" it. If anyone tried to take it from him, he would say, "My Bible, Mathew's Bible!"

It caused me to think about how children learn so much from watching us then imitating us. Now, that is wonderful when it's something like reading the Bible, but tends to raise my hair when it's using the knife I left out! Reading the Bible to our children is something my husband Rick and I do frequently, usually at bedtime each school day and at our Sunday morning fellowship.

One of my favorite sections of scripture is Deuteronomy 6:4ff:

Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

If we as parents don't impress the Word of God on our children, no one else will; not our schools, not television, not Nintendo. It might be nice if they would help, but as parents, God has given us that responsibility and joy.

Teaching our children about God and His kingdom, His righteousness, justice, mercy, love, grace, comfort, etc. is not something we can do one hour a week at Bible class. It has to be all day, every day and in all situations.

When children argue (and they will if you have more than one no matter how "perfect" they are) it's time to teach them the Bible. A few of my favorites are: "Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:31). "Love one another with a pure heart, fervently" (I Pet. 1:22). "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 5:32). And I'm sure you can find many more appropriate verses.

When God blesses a child in a special way, be sure to give God the glory. This week my 8 year old son, Michael, who loves birds and wants to breed them when he's older, found a very nice woman who breeds cockatiels, parakeets and other birds. In exchange for help in cleaning the cages she is willing to teach him much of what she knows about birds. But, perhaps the biggest blessing is that she lives just around the corner within easy walking distance! Our first response was to thank God and give Him the glory.

Also, teach your children to pray and that prayer is heard by God who answers according to his will. I have seen my children's prayers answered many times and I think God must delight in showing His goodness that way. Ephesians 6:18 is the reference I

chose to teach this command of God, although there are many more.

These are just a few examples of how to teach the commandments of God all day long. There are, of course, many, many more! Just like with anything else you teach, not only do we have to speak it, but we also have to show it. "Do as I say and not as I do" will not work if we want to raise godly children. So parents, continue in faith, love and hope. Especially love your children with God's unselfish love and enjoy them! To see our children, "clutching" God's Word to their hearts should be our primary goal as parents.

[Rick and Della Waite home-school their children and have a home Bible fellowship in Wendell, North Carolina]

**

Books in Review

Paul's Idea of Community

The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting

by Robert Banks

Today many Christian believers participate in one of the thousands of house churches that have come into existence throughout the world in the last quarter of a century. Most of these were formed in an effort to pattern themselves after the original house churches of the first century and/or because of conflicts within hierarchical structures of other churches. Similar arrangements, however, exist even within traditional churches and include home Bible study fellowships or prayer meetings. Anyone involved in such home fellowships, or interested in how the first century church operated, would benefit from Robert Banks' book *Paul's Idea of Community*. This thoroughly researched book sets forth in great detail how the original house churches of biblical times functioned within the cultures and societies of the first century. It is a biblical presentation of the "ekklesia" - the household gathering of believers.

Banks offers an invaluable guide to the reasons for the original house churches' vitality and effectiveness. And though Banks is a highly regarded biblical scholar, this book is very readable

and without technical language or cumbersome footnotes. It is, however, well documented with numerous scripture references so that the reader can check things out for him or herself. Chapter titles include among others: "The Social and Religious Setting;" "The Arrival of Radical Freedom;" "Church as Household Gathering;" "The Community as a Loving Family;" and "Unity in Diversity Among the Members."

I highly recommend this book - from cover to cover - for all who are interested in this important subject.

[This book, along with most others recommended in this newsletter, is available at a discount through: Christian Book Distributors (CBD), P.O. Box 7000, Peabody, MA 01961-7000, ph. 1-508-977-5000]

**

Living Letters

Dear *Unity*:

I really enjoyed the most recent *The Unity of the Spirit* newsletter. Chuck's article on "Work" was especially helpful. Thanks for your devotion of time and energy to the Lord's work.

Love & God Bless
Beth Frook
Clifton, Virginia

Dear *Unity*:

All the best to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thankyou for the newsletter which we enjoyed very much.

Today we had fellowship at Anka and Marcin's apartment. It was especially good because Anka had an exceptionally good teaching.

Kasia sends her love and regards. She has read everything we have in Polish. She is devouring the knowledge and judges for herself "if these things are so." We all go regularly to our fellowships at Leszek and Olga's. Over the holidays we met together several times with Adam and Marta and their children while they were visiting from England. At one of the fellowships it was hard to fit everybody in the room because of all the children!

One of my wishes for the future is to have fellowships at our place for some new people like our friends and some younger acquaintances. Please keep this in your prayers.

We love you and pray for you often. Please, remember us to the other saints there!

Love in Christ,
Irena, Krzys, David & Daniel Razny
Cracow, Poland

Dear *Unity*:

Thankyou very much for *The Unity of the Spirit*. I read and learn a lot from each issue. I know it is one more step for me in knowing God better. Chuck's wonderful article in the last issue on "Work" helped me to better understand about the subject of work in relationship to God.

This year I got my first apartment and of course the door is always open for you. It was at Easter when I first got the key so when I entered for the first time I just sat down, opened my Bible and thanked God for this change of my life.

I look forward to the Tatras' Fellowship in Poland in July of this year. I can't imagine my summer without it now.

The Hungarian fellowship is working together well. I really like to be together with these Christian people and to share God's Word together. Thankyou very much for all your prayers. Even if we are far away geographically we feel the close spiritual relationship.

God bless every believer in your fellowship!

Love in Christ,
Andrea Rigo
Budapest, Hungary

Dear *Unity*:

Warmest greetings! I thankfully received your packet of three copies of your newsletter *The Unity of the Spirit* which I found to be a great blessing to me personally. Kindly enroll me on your permanent mailing list and send three copies of each issue along with back issues if available. Kindly also add your study booklet "God's Plan of Salvation" and all available (used or old) study tools for a working knowledge of a Bible translator into native tongues.

I am engaged in translation work both of the Old and New Testaments into our native tongue "Telugu" - a second major language of India next to "Hindi". I request your prayers and all possible encouragement for a vital ministry here in India.

Thankyou once again for the kind concern for the work that is here.

Dr. Raju Merupu
Christian Library and Reading Center
Andhra, South India

Dear *Unity*:

Greetings in the name of our Lord and coming Savior Jesus Christ! What a blessing it was to receive your letter. I'm encouraged greatly that there are others personally motivated to do what they can for God's kingdom in Eastern Europe. The Lord bless you!

Thankyou for sending me your newsletters and what's been translated into Russian thus far. Please do keep me updated on what you have translated into Russian. We now have two booklets by Anthony Buzzard translated into Russian as well as several tracts on the mortality of man, the attributes of God, etc.

I'm encouraged with the forming of our agency "Lord's Harvest International." Unfortunately, we don't have the resources of other mainline evangelical groups. I'm trying to encourage stepping out in faith rather than waiting for everything to be perfect before more is done here in Russia and in general.

May God continue to bless your work!

Your sister in Christ
Tracy Savage
Missionary
St. Petersburg, Russia

Dear *Unity*:

Thanks for sending me *The Unity of the Spirit* series as requested for me by Catharine Gober. It seems that a number of us have gone through similar experiences with the only difference being that of denominational name. So I can appreciate where you're coming from.

For many years, despite being involved in two denominations, I was a skeptic in regards to believing that God personally responds to people today. How could I break such a mind-set? Ultimately, it was through the hand of God Himself in dramatic answers to my prayers. I could no longer solve my problems in life and was forced to turn to a greater power. I concluded that I must -

choose to believe. I had never thought of it that way before. I simply chose to believe. At that very instant I became aware that faith is a personal trust in God.

I began to test God to see if He was actually answering prayer today. He answered my prayer dramatically. Then I wondered if it was "one to a customer!" As great unsolvable problems grew in my life I asked again in prayer. That was answered too. The more prayers I made the more God answered and the more a personal relationship developed. It is as the Bible says, "He who comes to God must believe that he is" - plain and simple!

In Christian Sincerity,
Dave Opel
Wenatchee, Washington

Dear *Unity*:

Thanks for the newsletters. I read the first one and enjoyed it and have glanced at the second. It was a blessing to see a letter from Andy Richman.

Our fellowship here in Tuscon is such a blessing. We are really working the subject of "believing." It's been "eye-opening!" One verse Gil recently brought to our attention, which has really blessed me, is II Peter 1:4. God has given us "exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

We escape the corruption in the world by believing God's promises! (I John 5:4)! So, we have a choice to put on God's Word and be *transformed* or we can choose to go by the world's systems which are corrupt and be *conformed* (Rom. 12:2). This enables me to more concretely see that I have a choice for the direction my life will take. Also, it helps me to recognize that as I walk with God, even though there will be troubles or afflictions, this doesn't mean I'm doing something wrong because the Bible says these will come. But as we stand, God will deliver us (II Tim. 3:10-12). We live by God's exceeding great and precious promises so that when the winds beat upon us, we do not fall, but stand (Matt. 7:24-27)!

God bless you and your fellowship!
Love in Christ,

Rosina Stevenson
Tuscon, Arizona

Dear *Unity*:

I appreciate the work you are doing and would like to receive your publication when it is published every quarter. I will submit articles for publication as I have occasion. I was Associate Editor of *Kingdom Counsel* for years. This was a monthly publication concerned primarily with eschatology.

Though I am not a universalist or charismatic, I do subscribe to a unitarian view of the nature of God (and of Jesus Christ). I do have an open mind and believe that constant study of the Scriptures in prayer and open-mindedness are essential in our quest for the truth.

I look forward to reading your publications!

In His Service
Jeff Kessel
Limestone, New York

Notes & Quotes on the Bible

The People of God

The biblical topic of the one "people of God" is a fascinating study that begins in the Book of Genesis and continues throughout the Bible. It culminates in the creation of a newly constituted NT people of God called out from among Jew and Gentile alike to be "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28) or "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph. 2:19). This newly formed *ekklesia* (church) is nothing less than the fulfillment of God's "plan of the ages" (Eph. 3:11) - the "end-time" goal of that which God has been working out from before the creation of the world "in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:9-11).

F.F. Bruce explains the continuity of this theme of the "people of God" in the light of God's overall plan of salvation:

The Bible's central message is the story of salvation, and throughout both Testaments three strands in this unfolding story can be distinguished: the bringer of salvation, the way of salvation, and the heirs of salvation. This could be reworded in terms of the covenant idea by saying that the central message of the Bible is God's covenant with men, and that the strands are the mediator of the covenant, the basis of the covenant, and the covenant people. God himself is the Savior of his people; it is he who confirms his covenant-mercy with them. The bringer of salvation, the mediator of the covenant, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The way of salvation, the basis of the covenant, is God's grace, calling forth from his people a response of faith and obedience. The heirs of salvation, the covenant people, are the Israel of God, the church of God.

The continuity of the covenant people from the Old Testament to the New Testament is obscured for the reader of the common English Bible because "church" is an exclusively New Testament word, and he naturally thinks of it as something which began in the New Testament period. But the reader of the Greek Bible was confronted by no new word when he found *ekklesia* in the New Testament; he had already met it in the Septuagint as one of the words used to denote Israel as the "assembly" of the

Lord's people. To be sure, it has a new and fuller meaning in the New Testament. The old covenant people had to die with him in order to rise with him to a new life - a new life in which national restrictions had disappeared. Jesus provides in himself the vital continuity between the old Israel and the new, and his faithful followers were both the righteous remnant of the old and the nucleus of the new. The servant Lord and his servant people bind the two Testaments together (*The Origin of the Bible*, pp. 11-12, Tyndale Pub.).

It should be emphasized that biblically the NT church of the body of Christ is *not* the subject of a special dispensation placed *in between* God's dealings with Israel. Instead, the new covenant people of God stand in direct continuity with the faithful people of the Old Testament. The "mystery" in regards to the church of the body of Christ had to do primarily with the constitution, or make-up, of the new covenant people of God - i.e. one body made up of believers in Christ not only from Jews but also from *Gentiles* on an equal basis - not with the fact that there would be a new covenant *ekklesia*. It is the original Abrahamic covenant of faith, as set forth in Genesis 15, etc. and expounded in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 and 9-11 that marks out the true people of God throughout the Bible, thus providing the continuity between the Old Testament and the New. As Paul states:

"... not all who are descended from [ethnic] Israel are [true] Israel.

Nor because they are his [ethnic] descendants are they all Abraham's [true] children.

In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise [i.e. those who have true faith] who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (Rom. 9:6-8).

In the OT God called Israel as a nation to be his people of faith and to show forth the fruits of their relationship with him as their God. This was intended to be a witness to the nations of the world of the one true God's love, justice and goodness to his people and, thus, to bring these other nations into the blessings of the people of God. But the infidelity of the people of Israel made this impossible for God to achieve in the circumstances of the Old Testament era. The only solution was for the establishment of a

new covenant via the work of Christ. The resulting newly constituted "circumcision" (Phil. 3:1-3) or true "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) is a people who are now set free, by the Spirit, to worship God in spirit and in truth - thus, fulfilling that which the Father had always desired (John 4:21-24).

The Turning of the Ages

In order to fully appreciate the significance of this subject to us as believers within the new covenant era we must endeavor to understand the Old Testament in *exactly the same way* as the original believers of the first century church interpreted it. In short, we must put ourselves in their "sandals," accept their perspective and interpret the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament themes according to *their* understanding. In doing so we will be on solid ground, for the apostles' understanding of these matters was not only shaped by the "Christ event" (i.e. Christ's life, death, resurrection, and giving of the Spirit) but also by the risen Christ's own personal explanation of the significance of these events as well as by his continued guidance through the Spirit (Luke 24: 25-27, 44-49; Eph. 3:5-6).

Fundamental to the understanding of the first century church was a unique perspective of history that had its roots in the Jewish conception of history as consisting of two ages. E. Earl Ellis explains this in his book *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (pp. 163-166, Baker):

Jesus and his disciples conceive of history within the framework of two ages: this age and the age to come [e.g. Mt. 12:32; Mk 10:30; Lk. 20:34f; cp. Paul, Eph. 1:21]. This perspective appears to have its background in the Old Testament prophets, who prophesied of 'the last days' and 'the day of the Lord' as the time of an ultimate redemption of God's people and the destruction of their enemies. It becomes more specific in the apocalyptic writers, who underscored ... the doctrine of two ages and the radical difference between the present time and the time to come ...

Platonic and later Gnostic thought anticipate a redemption *from* matter, an escape from time and history at death. The Jewish hope includes a redemption *of* matter within time: the present age, from creation to the coming of the Messiah, is to be succeeded by a future age of peace and

righteousness under the reign of God. The New Testament's modification of [this Jewish view] rests upon the perception that in the mission, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, the age to come, the kingdom of God, had become present in hidden form in the midst of the present evil age, although its public manifestation awaits the parousia of Jesus. Thus, for Jesus 'the kingdom of God does not culminate a meaningless history, but a planned divine process.' Equally, for the NT writers faith in Jesus means faith in the story of Jesus, the story of God's redemptive activity in the history of Israel that finds its high-point and fulfillment in Jesus.

For this reason the mission and meaning of Jesus can be expressed in the New Testament in terms of a *salvation history* 'consisting of a sequence of events especially chosen by God, taking place within an historical framework' ... The concept is most evident in the way the New Testament relates current and future events to events, persons and institutions in the Old Testament. That relationship is usually set forth as a typological correspondence [and] expresses most clearly the basic attitude of primitive Christianity toward the Old Testament. It is ... a 'spiritual perspective' from which the early Christian community viewed itself.

Gordon Fee further explains this post-Pentecost understanding of the NT church in his commentary on I Corinthians (*The New Int. Com. on the NT, I Corinthians*. p. 459, Eerdmans):

Through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ marks the turning of the ages; the old is on its way out, the new has begun (2 Cor. 5:17). He has set the future irresistibly in motion; and the new people of God, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female, who are his by grace alone, are the people of the End, "upon whom the ends of the ages have come" and "toward whom all history has its goal." That is what constitutes the typological element in OT stories; ultimately the whole OT has been pointing toward its eschatological fulfillment in God's new people. And that is why the OT is their book in particular - because it has Christ as its prime actor and final goal. This does not mean that Israel, or its history, was not important in its own right, but that they stand at the beginning of the promises of God that are now finding their fulfillment at the end of the ages ... Christians stand at the end of history, at the time when God is bringing all of the divine purposes into focus and fulfillment in Christ.

It must be emphasized in all of this that the effects of Christ's accomplishments are "once for

all." There can be no "going back" under the law or a future dealing with Israel "according to the flesh" *apart from* this already accomplished reality "in Christ." The new covenant has been established and the one newly constituted people of God has been realized "in Christ." Membership in it is based solely on faith in Christ and the corresponding reception of the Spirit - for both Jew and Gentile alike. For "all (ethnic) Israel" to be saved (Rom. 11:26) they must be brought into this new covenant which Christ has already established. There can be no "undoing" of what Christ has done. All that remains is the final consummation at Christ's return (Eph. 1:9-10).

The New Covenant "People of God"

That the new covenant *ekklesia* (i.e. the post-Pentecost church of the body of Christ) believed itself to be in direct continuity with the Old Testament people of God as those "upon whom the fulfillment of the ages had come" cannot be stressed strongly enough. This truth is seen in the typological correspondence between the OT and the NT and especially in the use of Old Testament "people of God" language to describe the NT people of God. Gordon Fee describes the significance of this terminology in his book *Gospel and Spirit* (pp. 124-130, Hendrickson). I quote at length:

By pursuing the New Testament language for the Christian communities, I hope to demonstrate two realities about them: (a) their strong sense of *continuity* with the people of God under the former covenant, and (b) their basically *corporate* nature.

That the early believers thought in terms of continuity is writ large on nearly every page, in nearly every document. They did not see themselves as the "*new* people of God," but as the "people of God *newly constituted*." Nowhere is this more clear than in their adopting Old Testament "people of God" language, a language appropriation that is as varied as it is thoroughgoing.

a. *Church (ekklesia)*: Because this word does not appear in the English Old Testament, and because its usage for the "assembly" of the Greek *polis* is generally well known, the Old Testament background for New Testament usage is frequently overlooked. In the Septuagint (LXX) *ekklesia* is regularly used to translate the Hebrew *qahal*, referring most often to the "congregation of Israel," especially when it was gathered for religious purposes. Thus this word in particular was a natural

one for the early believers to bridge the gap as they began to spill over into the Gentile world.

Since the concept of a "gathered people" was primary in Greek and LXX usage, it is arguable that this is what lay behind the earliest Christian usage as well. Thus in its first [chronological] appearance in the New Testament (I Thess 1:1) Paul is probably thinking primarily of the Christian community as a gathered people, constituted "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," who would be listening to the letter as it was read. It is also arguable that its usage throughout the New Testament never gets very far away from this nuance; the *ekklesia* refers first of all to the people in the various cities and towns who gather regularly in the name of the Lord for worship and instruction.

b. *People (laos)*: Although not particularly popular with Greek writers, this is the word chosen by the LXX translators to render the Hebrew *'am*, the word that occurs most often (over 2000 times) to express the special relationship Israel had with Yahweh: Above all else they were Yahweh's "people." ... In most cases it is the collective word that designates the whole people whom God had chosen ... Thus, in Exodus 19:5, in establishing his covenant with them at Sinai, God says (LXX), "You shall be for me a *laos periousios* (special/chosen people) from among the *ethnon* (nations/Gentiles)."

In the New Testament the word occurs most often to refer to the Jewish people of that era. But in many striking passages it is used in its Old Testament sense, especially reflecting the language of Exodus 19:5-6, to refer to people of the new covenant, usually in contexts that include Gentiles. Thus Luke reports James as saying: "How God at first showed his concern by taking from the *ethnon* a *laos* for his name" (Acts 15:14); in 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul, by way of Old Testament citation, specifically applies "people of God" language to God's new temple, the church; in Titus 2:14 the goal of Christ's saving purpose is "that he might purify for himself a *laos periousios*," while I Peter 2:9-10 combines "people" language from two Old Testament passages (Isa. 43:20/Exod. 19:6/Isa. 43:21), followed by a word play on Hosea 2:25, to designate Gentile Christians as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God," who were formerly "no people" but now "are the people of God." So also the author of Hebrews transfers several Old Testament "people" passages or concepts to the church (2:17; 4:9; 7:27; 13:12).

c. *Covenant (diatheke)*: Although this term does not occur often in the New Testament, it is used in ways that are significant to our topic. The author of Hebrews in particular adopts covenantal language to tie the new to the old, seeing Christ as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's "new covenant" in which God says again, as in the Sinai covenant, "They shall be for me a people" (Heb. 8:7-12; citing Jer. 31:34). Paul also adopts this language to refer to the "new covenant" of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:6; cf. Gal. 4:24). Perhaps even more significantly, as the people joined in common fellowship at the Table of the Lord in the Pauline churches, they did so with these words: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25; Luke 22:20). It should be noted that both the language "new covenant" and its close tie with the Spirit and the people of God are seen in terms of continuity with the Old Testament (in this case as fulfillment); thus in the church's earliest worship ... there was the constant reminder of their continuity/discontinuity with the past.

d. *Saints (hoi hagioi)*: Although not frequent in the Old Testament, the designation of Israel as God's "holy people" occurs in the crucial covenantal passage in Exodus 19:5-6, an expression that in later Judaism referred to the elect who were to share in the blessings of the messianic kingdom (Dan. 7:18-27). This is Paul's primary term for God's newly formed, eschatological people ... In all cases it is a designation for the collective people of God, who are to bear his "holy" character and thus to be "set apart" for his purposes. To put that another way, the New Testament knows nothing about individual "saints," only about Christian communities as a whole who take up the Old Testament calling of Israel to be "God's holy people" in the world.

e. *Chosen (eklektos and cognates)*: Closely related to the covenant is the concept of Israel as having been chosen by God, by an act of sheer mercy on his part. In the Old Testament this concept is most often found in verb form, with God as the subject. However, the LXX of Isaiah 43:20-21 uses *eklektos* as a designation for the restored people of God. This usage is picked up in several places in the New Testament (e.g. Mark 13:22; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; Col. 3:12; Eph. 1:4, 11; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9). As in the Old Testament, the term refers not to individual election, but to a people who have been chosen by God for his purposes; as one has been incorporated into, and thus belongs to, the chosen people of God, one is in that sense also elect. Likewise in the Old Testament, this language places the ultimate ground of our being in a sovereign and

gracious God, who willed and initiated salvation for his people.

f. *Royal Priesthood*: This term, taken directly from Exodus 19:6, is used in 1 Peter 2:9-10 to refer to the church. I include it here not only because it is further demonstration of continuity, but also because as in the Exodus passage it so clearly refers to the people corporately, not to individual priests or to the priesthood of individual believers. The NT knows nothing of the "priesthood of the believer" as it is popularly conceived, with each person's being his own priest with God ... To the contrary, the NT teaches that the church has a priestly function for the world (1 Pet. 2:9-10); and our role of ministering to one another makes us priests one for another.

g. *The Israel of God*: This unique expression occurs only in Galatians 6:16 in the entire Bible. Nonetheless, in some ways it gathers up much of the NT thinking - especially Paul's - on this matter. All those who live by the "rule" that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, these are "the Israel of God" upon whom God's benediction of *shalom* and mercy now rests. While it is true that Paul does not call the church the "new Israel," such passages as Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6; Philippians 3:3, and this one demonstrate that Paul saw the church as the "true Israel," i.e. as in the true succession of the Old Testament people of God. At the same time it emphasizes that those people are now newly constituted - composed of Jew and Gentile alike and based solely on faith in Christ and the gift of the Spirit.

This comes through nowhere more forcefully than in the argument of Galatians itself, for which this passage serves as the climax. Paul's concern throughout has been to argue that through Christ and the Spirit Gentiles share with believing Jews full privileges in the promises made to Abraham ... They do not need to submit to the regulations of the old covenant in order to be full members of the people of God; indeed, in "belonging to Christ" they are "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (3:29) ...

Here especially the primary name of God's ancient people has been taken over in the interests of continuity, but now predicated on new terms. The *Israel of God* includes both Jew and Gentile, who by faith in Christ and "adoption" by the Spirit have become Abraham's "free children" and ... inheritors of the promises made to Abraham ...

h. *Further (Non-Old Testament) Images*: The essentially corporate nature of the people of God is

further demonstrated by the various images for the church found in the New Testament: *family*, where God is Father and his people are brothers and sisters (2 Cor. 6:18); the related image of *household*, where the people are members of the household (I Tim. 3:5, 15) and their leaders the Master's servants (I Cor. 4:1-3); *body*, where the emphasis is simultaneously on their unity and diversity (I Cor. 10:17; 12:12-26); God's *temple*, or sanctuary, where by the Spirit they corporately serve as the place of God's dwelling (I Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22); God's *commonwealth*, where as citizens of heaven Jew and Gentile alike form a *polis* in exile, awaiting their final homeland (Phil. 3:20-21; Eph. 2:19; I Pet. 1:1, 17).

In sum: By using so much Old Testament language to mark off its identity, the early church saw itself not only as in continuity with the Old Testament people of God, but as in the true succession of that people. One of the essential features of this continuity is the corporate nature of

the people of God. God chose, and made covenant with, not individual Israelites but with a people, who would bear his name and be for his purposes. Although individual Israelites could forfeit their position in Israel, this never affected God's design or purposes with the people as a people. This is true even when the majority failed, and the "people" were reduced to a "remnant." That remnant was still Israel - loved, chosen, and redeemed by God.

This is the thoroughgoing perspective of the New Testament as well, but at the same time Christ's coming and the gift of the eschatological Spirit also marked a new way by which they were constituted. The community is now entered individually through faith in Christ and the reception of the Spirit ... Nonetheless, the church itself is the object of God's saving activity in Christ. God is thus choosing and saving a people for his name.

**