

O. WILLIAM COOPER

Where
ARE YOU?

*A study of Biblical images
of our intimacy with God.*

Where Are You ?!

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By

O. William Cooper

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Gratefully

Bill Cooper

INTRODUCTION

When people think and talk about the nature of God, it is usually focused on His power and holiness. That is appropriate because the Scriptures deal carefully with His omnipotence and His holy nature. This is true, but it is not the whole story. One of the major Biblical portrayals of God's nature is that He seeks our fellowship.

The crowning point in His miraculous creation was the forming of a being He called "Adam". Mankind was the only part of creation that was made "in His image." You know the story of Genesis chapter three. Mankind had knowingly disobeyed God's command concerning the fruit of the trees in the garden. This violated the purpose of His creation and broke the fellowship with God.

But God created mankind for intimate fellowship. God's purpose in this magnificent creative act was unfulfilled. This brings us to Genesis chapter three where God came looking for the pinnacle of His creation, crying out, "**Where are you?!**" In that instant, the Bible presents the picture of the relationship between God and mankind which continues to this very day – God was seeking the fellowship of mankind. On the other hand, mankind was busy hiding, distancing himself from his Creator. From Genesis to Revelation you have one picture after another of God seeking the fellowship of mankind while people of every generation try to hide from His presence because of their guilt.

God initiated a relationship with Israel with whom He wished to share a unique, special relationship as "His people." Study the story of the Exodus and you will see this scenario played out time after time. What many people see in the book of Judges as the picture of God destroying people was simply God trying to draw His people back into an intimate relationship with Himself. In the books of Samuel through Chronicles, God sought an intimate relationship whereby He would guide His people, but the people were busy seeking a king as their leader.

Jesus did not wait for needy people to come to Him, but went seeking people to teach and show His merciful power in their healing. The book of Acts is a picture of Jesus sending His followers to spread the good news of the Gospel to people of all nations. Throughout the epistles, God inspired chosen servants like Paul, Peter and James to explain to those who would share fellowship with Him exactly what this intimate relationship with God would be like.

God used two basic means to explain, to those whom He has forgiven, the intimate relationship He longs to share with them. In the Scriptures, He describes, in some detail, the relationships which are carried on within the Trinity. Now, our finite minds cannot fully comprehend the infinite relationships that are lived out within the Trinity. One must ask the question, if in our finiteness we are incapable of grasping the depths of Their infinite relationships, then why would He share this information with us? God shares this information with us for at least two reasons: First, He wants us to be a full participant in all of these relationships. He also wants to share the information with us because it is a pattern that He wants to establish in our relationships with each other. This intimate relationship is unlike most human relationships. That being the case, He used a long list of images that people knew very well to describe a relationship which they did not understand at all. This is the reason the Scriptures talk about abiding in Christ, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the family identifications we use, such as Father, Son and brother, adoption and ingrafting.

Both the interrelationships within the Trinity and the depiction of all of these images are interesting bits of information and are just that – interesting. They take on phenomenal importance when we implement the two together in order to describe the relationship God had in mind in Genesis chapter three as well as what He desires for the here-and-now. As He said, "I am the Lord, I do not change."

Frankly, the enemy has managed to keep our attention focused on the things that divide us in order to keep us from discerning the beautiful, intimate relationship God wants to share with us and which He wants us to share with each other. It is high time to change that situation because these are commands. This study will pursue these issues.

EXAMPLES OF DIVINE INTIMACY

THE SEEKING GOD

The Old and New Testaments represent totally different eras, but they carefully support each other. They particularly agree in their portrayal of God. Both Testaments picture **God as seeking after people**, the pinnacle of creation. On the other hand, both picture **human beings as avoiding, rejecting God**. We want to look at the intersection of these two purposes.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:8, 9

God knew that the couple had disobeyed His command. God was seeking their fellowship. He even called out to them to make contact. The fact that they had disobeyed did not hinder God's seeking after them. Look at Adam and Eve. God was seeking them and they were hiding from Him. God tried to make contact with them and they were avoiding contact with Him. They claimed fear as their motive. It certainly involved fear, but there were other factors as well. Adam and Eve knew they had disobeyed. They had to feel indescribable guilt. To hide would seem to indicate that their fear focused on punishment. At least one thing seems to be missing in this encounter. There seems to be no necessary sorrow for their wrong doing. In this dark moment of their despair, there was an intersection between human fear and guilt and that powerful divine desire. That intersection is the cross.

And it came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. Exodus 16:10

Essentially, this is the same scene you have in Genesis chapter three. Throughout the Scriptures, God seeks the presence of His people. This passage is an illustration of that truth. God yearns for the fellowship of His people. Two things stand out here: God takes the initiative. God acted in a visible manner. He wanted Israel to know He was coming to be among them. Because God is spirit, He could have been in the midst of Israel and they would never have known it. That does not satisfy the Divine passion. God longs for the presence of His people and He insists that they know He is there. That is what God is like.

"Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you." Leviticus 26:11

Here, again, God seeks the presence of His people. Observe, however, that it is more than being in physical presence. God is omnipresent. He went beyond omnipresence to say, "I will make My dwelling among you." God was already among them. He was describing the relationship that is the product of this nearness. This verse may seem to contradict itself. It does not. In Leviticus chapter 26, God made the same statement in two different forms. This is the Biblical means of emphasis. God does not have to make His dwelling among Israel, he is already there and everywhere else. God is saying He will nurture an intimate relationship growing out of His nearness. This is God's doing, not ours.

He also said, "My soul will not reject you." One must ask why does God say, "MY SOUL will not reject you"? What would be different if God had simply said, "I will not reject you"? The answer lies at the point of God's indescribable intensity of desire. It is like saying, "At the deepest level of His being, God reached out with irresistible desire to refuse to reject those who were bent upon rejecting Him. That would be appropriate in view of the way Israel responded to God; it would not be surprising for God to reject them. The promise not to reject them is an excellent example of the extension of sheer mercy.

In Numbers, chapter two, the author gives us a picture of the way the tribes of Israel were located when they camped for the night or for a lengthy stay. In this description there is another picture of how God relates to His people. From the diagram, it is clear that God is firmly in the midst of Israel. No one is far away. No one is nearer than another.

Where Are You ?!

NORTH SIDE

Dan, Asher, Naphtali

WEST SIDE

Ephraim
Manasseh
Benjamin

Holy of holies	Holy place
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EAST SIDE

Judah
Issachar
Zebulun

Reuben, Simeon, Gad

SOUTH SIDE

God, in the tabernacle, was surrounded by His people, but this was more than proximity. This was an intentional way to be as close as possible to every tribe. Protocol would have placed some closer than others. Fortunately, God is not committed to such protocol. He seeks to be as near as possible to every person in every tribe.

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel." Exodus 40:34-38

It was more than the fact that Israel could see that God was with them. The divine presence became their guide and counselor all during the journey. There is no doubt that a divine desire was satisfied as God dwelt in the midst of Israel. At the same time, the visible presence was a source of assurance to Israel. Even in the satisfaction of His desires, God was reaching out to draw His people closer to Him in order to meet their needs.

In the Old Testament, there was also another understanding of the presence of God with Israel. You can see this in the experience when the Ark was taken by the Philistines.

And she called the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel," because the Ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God was taken." I Samuel 4:21-22

The Ark had been captured by the Philistines. This was frightening to Israel because they had come to think of it like a rabbit's foot. It never dawned on them that the Ark was a powerless box of wood except for the presence of God. The Ark had no beneficial meaning for the benefit of the Philistines at all. When told of the capture of the Ark, Eli fell off a log and died. His daughter-in-law died in childbirth, but as she did, she named her son Ichabod – "The glory has departed from Israel." They thought of the divine presence, in the visible image of the Ark, as a source of protection and blessing. Without the Ark, the visible symbol of the divine presence, they saw only defeat and destruction.

The result of God's seeking Israel was, in part, that they found comfort and strength in His presence even though they rebelled against Him.

THE SEEKING GOD

In the New Testament, there are many images that point to the seeking character of God. Luke quoted Jesus in the thirteenth chapter of his gospel record.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! Luke 13:34

Here, again, you see a picture of people rebelling and God seeking them out. There is pain and sorrow in the words of Jesus. It is a picture of the rejected lover. Jesus frankly acknowledged their sin and rebellion, but still declared His love and desire to be their protector.

Jesus' use of the image of the hen and her chicks is an apt image to illustrate what He said through great pain. It is a simile. The presence of the hen assured the chicks of their survival. At great personal risk the hen gathered her little ones under her wings. She clucks until they nestle quietly beneath her wings. Her nearness is their survival. In the same way, Jesus intensely sought to provide shelter for the rebellious and disobedient of this great city, but they refused His holy protection.

In Matthew 25, Jesus taught concerning the future. This is a picture of heaven.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'come you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Matthew 25:34

Jesus spoke of Himself as the "King." You will note that the King said, "Come you who are blessed of My FATHER." The "King" cannot refer to God the Father. It must be a reference to Christ, Himself.

The King spoke to those on His right. This is the position of trust and privilege. In that culture, right and left hand had very special meaning. It was not a casual request when the mother of James and John asked if her two sons could sit at Jesus' right and left hand in His kingdom. The person who sat at the right hand of the king was the second most powerful person in the realm. It was the place occupied by both Joseph and Mordecai. The person on the king's right hand always had access to the king and would probably receive whatever he requested. Jesus sat at the Father's right hand. He had access to the Father at all times. From that privileged position He intercedes on behalf of our every need. Jesus invited them to receive the kingdom that was prepared for them from before creation. This is a very intimate personal invitation to receive the inheritance that God had planned for them before there was time.

It is interesting that when people speak of their experience of forgiveness, they so often use the words, "I sought the Lord." We must acknowledge that there is a command in Scripture, "Seek ye the Lord." The point of this command has more to do with our openness to His advances rather than our pursuit of His presence. Throughout the Scriptures, however, there is a picture of God lovingly seeking after those whom He created in His own image.

This gives us a slight glimpse into the immensity and intensity of His love. Granted His nearness fulfills His longing to be with us. It is, also, an aggressive expression of His desire to meet our undeserving need for comfort, protection and solace. At depth, it is that burning unselfishness seeking to enable us to become what we are unable otherwise to be. This divine seeking is for a relationship so beautiful, so vast that it defies careful description.

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshipped him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "all authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:16-20

How tragic! Even after the resurrection and several intimate appearances of Jesus, still some doubted.

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In the face of this, still Jesus wanted to use these very undependable witnesses to reach out to others who could not yet believe. In the midst of their struggle to believe, Jesus gave His promise without condition, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

That is the kind of God who seeks our constant, intimate presence. He calls out to us as to Adam and Eve, "**where are you?**" He is seeking our presence to bless and benefit us in our off-times losing battle with the forces of evil.

On one occasion, I was a part of a team of Christian men who conducted a three-day short course in Christianity in a state prison facility. At the end of the three days, we gave the men an opportunity to say whatever they wanted to say to the whole group. One very stately young man walked up to the microphone and calmly said, "I thank God I am in prison." The whole team gasped with shock. He went on to say that for the first time he could see the many ways God had been reaching out to him only to be rejected. He knew of his grandmother's urgent prayers; his wife's tearful pleading. God reached out to him in many ways, through many different people. He said, "I never paid any attention until this weekend. Though I have mocked His people and laughed at His overtures, still He sought me until I finally admitted my great need and welcomed Him into my life."

Each month, the team visited the facility to disciple the new believers and watch them grow in grace. Across many years we watched that young man walk with God and grow in that grace that transforms life and sustains God's people. That is the searching God about whom we are focusing our attention here.

INTIMACY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Our Image

In the first chapter of Genesis, we are allowed to eavesdrop on the Trinity at work, God carrying out His will in concert with Himself. God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." Though they are three individual entities, they function as one. The author used the name "God," a translation of the Hebrew word "Elohim" to report this event. Indeed, throughout the report of creation, the author refers to deity as "God." This is important because the word "Elohim" highlights the omnipotence of God and is repeatedly used in situations involving God's mercy. Did you ever think of creation as a merciful event? Mankind was made in the image of God. The word translated "image" is "tselem" and means a resemblance. It speaks of this new creation as a resemblance of the one who created him. Man is a representation of what God is like. The word describes one who corresponds to the original.

God made man "according to our likeness." The word translated "likeness" comes from the word "damah" which means to compare or resemble. It is to be similar to. Man was not intended to be in any way divine, but God intended that if you knew what mankind is like, you would know a lot about what God is like.

So, if man is made in God's image and in His likeness, what is the difference between "image" and "likeness"? Or why did God use both terms? As you can see from the definitions above, the difference between the meanings of the two terms is negligible. Remember, whoever the author was, he was Jewish. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, one of the primary ways to emphasize a statement was to repeat. That is exactly what we have here. The author quotes God's highly emphatic statement that He intended the pinnacle of His creation to resemble Himself, to be a reflection of his personality and character. We were made in His image and likeness and as redeemed souls seeking to as Paul said, "be imitators of God." (An imitator is an actor.) Or as Peter said, "participate/share in the divine nature." God is reshaping our lives so that we, indeed, are a reflection of His nature and character.

We are made in His image and after His likeness, but what does that look like? How does that translate into every-day human experience? In Leviticus 11:44, the author quoted God as saying, "Be holy because I am holy." We must be absolutely clear that we cannot live a lifestyle that resembles the image and likeness of God unless we develop a growing holy lifestyle which is increasingly similar to the holiness of God. That is a great challenge, but it is what God has in mind as a purpose for our existence.

To be holy is the basic description of the life that is a representation of the character and nature of God. There are, however, a host of specific ingredients that make up that holy lifestyle. There is no single place in scripture where this list of holy ingredients is presented. There is, however, a long list of commands and examples to be found in both the Old and New Testaments. The Ten Commandments is a good place to start. The life that is lived in the image and after the likeness of God will be obedient to these 10 primary instructions God has given.

By His example and teachings, Jesus gave some very clear instructions about how we can live a life which is a reflection of the image and likeness of God. For more than three years, Jesus taught His disciples that His was a spiritual kingdom and not a political kingdom. After all that time, they were still looking for their place as important officials in His political government. His patience with their inability or unwillingness to be taught defies comprehension. That person who lives a life that is a representation of the image and likeness of God will be one in whom there is a growing, visible quality of patience akin to that exemplified in the life of Jesus.

At the end of the last Passover feast Jesus shared with His disciples, Jesus tied a towel around Himself and proceeded to wash the feet of the twelve. The disciples who made the preparations for the feast, presumably Peter and John, should have done this. Not one of the twelve was willing to take this servant role. Jesus washed their feet. In so doing, He demonstrated the humility of His character and the servant role of His self-understanding. If, indeed, we would live a life that resembles the image of God, then we must live a life of increasing humility. Nothing less will fulfill God's ultimate intent and purpose for our creation. The

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same would be true for everything Jesus taught and His every exemplary action that is recorded in the New Testament.

There are hundreds of commands for our instruction recorded in the epistles of the New Testament. We only reflect the nature and character of God as we increasingly demonstrate a growing obedience to these commands. In Peter's second epistle, the first chapter, he gives a list of instructions which are essential ingredients in the life of one who would represent the image and likeness of God in his lifestyle. This is how he put it.

Now for this reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness brotherly-kindness, and in your brotherly kindness love. II Peter 1:5-7

Through the apostle Peter, God was saying that the person having come to faith in Christ must grow in that relationship by increasing in moral excellence. Without this virtuous quality, it is not possible to resemble the image of God. Peter added that such a person must also grow in knowledge without which he cannot resemble the likeness of God. The apostle continued that there must be a growing ingredient of self-control. Without self-control, we cannot accurately reflect the image and likeness of God. To the quality of self-control, we must add the growing quality of perseverance and to perseverance we must also incorporate the quality of godliness if we would accurately reflect the nature of our creator. Again, to our godliness, we must also incorporate brotherly kindness "phileo" and to our brotherly kindness we must add love "agapae" if we would properly present an accurate impression of the nature of God.

Again, if we take seriously Paul's teaching in Galatians chapter five, there are two lists that we must take very seriously. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul gave us a list of 15 qualities that we must avoid if our lives are to resemble the image of God. He said we must increasingly avoid immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, and carousing. Those who are determined to represent the image of God, will refuse to participate in any one of these evil qualities.

In the paragraph immediately following Galatians 5:21, Paul gives a list of nine very positive qualities these new believers need to pursue. The apostle referred to these qualities as "the fruit of the Spirit." In effect, Paul was saying that the believer who resembles the image of God will vividly demonstrate the quality of (agapae) love. It is the Holy Spirit who produces the qualities of joy and peace in the life of the person whose life is a reflection of the image and likeness of God. Again, that person in which no patience has been fashioned by the Holy Spirit cannot accurately represent the image of God in his or her life. That person who is unkind cannot honestly claim the ministry of the Holy Spirit fashioning and forming his life in the image of God. That believer whose life is a reflection of the image of God will live a life which demonstrates God's goodness or else the Holy Spirit is not forming and shaping his life in the image of God. The Old Testament consistently presents a picture of God as being always faithful. The believer whose life is molded by the Spirit in the faithfulness of God is, indeed, a reflection of God's image. Many believers do the right thing, but have never been shaped by the Spirit in the beautiful quality of gentleness. To this extent, at least, they fail to accurately reflect the image of God. Paul points out that the Holy Spirit creates in the believer a heart of self-control. It is a visual image in human experience of the image and likeness of God.

Look at this through the eyes of modern understandings. Every child is conceived in the image and likeness of the two parents involved. Most people tend to look like one or both of their parents. A favorite pastime when a baby is born is asking, does this baby look like mama or papa? A child's personality also tends to be similar to one or both of their parents.

Before my father passed away, the two of us would sometimes go for a walk and share in a conversation about a very important topic. As we walked and talked, people would take notice and smile. The two of

INTIMACY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

us were walking slowly, heads down and hands clasped firmly behind our backs. Father has long since gone on to his heavenly reward, but I have a son. We too go for walks and talk about God and His church. As we walk, people observe and smile. They see us with our eyes looking down at the ground, our hands clasped behind our backs and deep in conversation. By the way, I was never aware of this until one day someone saw my father, my son and I walking and talking - heads down and hands clasped behind our backs. When they told me about this, I was quite surprised.

Today, we can take that a step further. Every human being has discernable DNA. By this means we can positively identify paternity and/or maternity. We are even able to identify a person's proneness to certain specific diseases or weaknesses that have been prevalent in the family.

Just what does intimacy look like? We get another glimpse into the meaning of that relationship when we move on to Genesis chapter three.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "where are you?" Genesis 3:8, 9

In the context of these verses, God had created our first parents and instructed them about how to live in their immaculate new surroundings, including "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." 2:17. We know that they did eat and of course, all of life was forever different from that point forward.

In Genesis 3:9, we view the foundation upon which intimacy with God is based. The holy, omnipotent creator was searching intensely for mankind the pinnacle of His creation. Whatever else is involved in this relationship, it grows out of an intense, burning desire on the part of God to communicate and share with the people He created to resemble Himself. In the ages before time and space, God could and did communicate, but only with Himself. Now that was changed. He had created a living person who resembled Him in character and personality. God's initial purpose in creation was accomplished.

That, however, is not the end of the story. After receiving their instructions, the man and his wife were busy using the capacities with which they were created. An intermediary enters the scene and challenges the instructions God gave to Adam and Eve. Eve bought into the deceptive scheme and Adam gave up his intended role and followed her lead. This choice destroyed the relationship God determined to share with those created to resemble him. While God was seeking them out, the man and his wife were busy distancing themselves from their creator who craved their companionship. If you think about it, this is exactly the same scenario that has been being played-out from that evening encounter between God and our first parents right up to today; God seeking; mankind hiding.

God's initial plan was frustrated. God intended the human beings He created to resemble His holy character. That was not completely destroyed, but it was severely damaged. In the heart of every tiny baby born on every continent in every century until this moment was born with an emptiness, a longing to relate to the one who created him or her.

Anthropologists may refer to this as the human penchant to worship. However one may identify it, we have this deep need for someone outside and greater than ourselves. We were made in His image; after His likeness.

In Exodus chapters three and four, we are again permitted to listen in on God's conversation with His servant Moses. As you read these chapters, it is easy to discover primary information about the intimate relationship between God and His servants.

Again in this situation, it is God who initiates the encounter and conversation. Moses was drawn into this relationship by a deliberate act of God. It would never have been Moses' choice.

This is a very intimate, personal relationship. God didn't reach out to whoever happened to be there. He chose Moses and called him by name. It is intimate in yet another way.

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He said also, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Then Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look at God." Exodus 3:6

God is not only the God of Moses, but He identified Himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," the three prominent forefathers of the people of Israel. At the same time God identified Himself with Moses' father.

In Exodus 3:7, God revealed that this encounter grew out of the divine awareness of Israel's painful condition. This is the height of divine compassion which caused Him to determine to deliver Israel, His people. God determined not only to deliver Israel from bondage, but also to bless them with the gift of a land to call their own.

God determined not only to send Moses on this important mission, but also to place the power of God at his disposal. Despite the presence and power of God, you again have a situation where God seeks to share mission and relationship with His servant, but Moses is busy balking, giving a host of reasons why he cannot do God's bidding. As Moses presents his lists of the impossibles and improbables, God made that ultimate promise, "I will be with you."

Throughout this story you will discover two counter-themes. God is calling, patiently promising His powerful presence while Moses explains in many ways this is a poor decision. Moses nervously pleads, begs to be excused, but God patiently seeks to help him.

THE PICTURE OF THE FATHER

In modern thought, the idea of "father" usually carries the idea of paternity and little more. The sharp rise in the number of one-parent families makes this way of thinking even stronger. "Father" in the New Testament involves much more than paternity.

In that time and culture, "father" was the most highly respected individual in a person's life. No one received more deference than "father." This respect was in no way changed when a man was married. He, like every other person in the clan, was under the careful direction of the "father." The father, without consultation, determined whom his son would marry and when. He also directed the son's affairs after the son was married and had children of his own.

The father was the provider. Everything needed by the entire clan was provided and overseen by the father. Everyone rightly assumed that father was alert to their needs and it was his joy to provide for them. He was the source of the inheritance for each of his sons. They worked to enhance the father's wealth, knowing that one day it would be theirs.

Father was the protector of the family. He would gladly give his life for any member of the clan. This is one reason it was such a traumatic event when God instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

In this part of the study, we will look at each facet of what the New Testament has to say about God as "Father." A part of this study has to do with the relationship between the Father and Jesus, the Son. This is important because the relationship between the Father and the Son is an illustration of our own relationship with the Father. It is a visual display of what we can expect our relationship with the Father to be.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." Matthew 16:27

In this verse, Jesus spoke of the relationship between Himself and the Father. When Jesus comes, He will come, "in the glory of the Father." The word translated "glory" is 'dokeo' and literally means "to think." It identifies what is evaluated as a good reputation. As Creator and Preserver of the universe, the Father has the reputation of being Almighty. His character is pristinely holy. The relationship between the Son and the Father is so intimate that they share a common reputation or attitude in the minds of those who know them. In that reputation, Jesus will come and judge every person on the basis of their actions.

Observe that Jesus said, "for the Son of man is going to come in the glory of His father." We have just reported that the word translated "glory" literally means "to think." It identifies one's good reputation. The Son will come sharing the Father's powerful, absolutely holy reputation. The New Testament picture of the Father and the Son is that of being indistinguishable from each other in terms of character.

But He answered them. "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working. John 5:17

Jesus was being verbally attacked and persecuted because He healed a man on the Sabbath. It was permissible to preserve a person's life on the Sabbath. Jesus had gone beyond preserving the man's life to improving it. The Pharisees determined this was a commandment violation. Jesus answered them in the words of this verse. In this statement, Jesus not only identified His actions with those of the Father, but He associated everything about His mission with that of the Father. His mission and that of the Father were indistinguishable one from the other.

Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me." John 8:49

Jesus' teaching and claim to be "the Son of Man" infuriated the Pharisees. In the dialogue, Jesus said the words recorded in this verse. The word translated "honor" is "timao" and means "to prize" or "hold in high respect." Though both Jesus and the Father are God, still there is a high level of honor and reverence that Jesus holds for the Father.

Where Are You ?!

"You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I." John 14:28

Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples that He was going to die. At last, they believed Him, but their fears were beyond control. In four chapters, John reported Jesus' attempts to calm and comfort the disciples. This verse is a part of what Jesus said. Jesus used the word translated "greater," which is "meizon". It literally means "larger." It also was used to identify one who is older. This is not a way of saying you have a system of value levels within the Trinity. It is quite possible for equals to say that one is held in great respect by another without being less than that person.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser." John 15:1

Repeatedly, Jesus used word pictures to convey understanding of concepts which were difficult to grasp. The story of the vine and the branches is one of these stories. When He said, "I am the vine and My Father is the vinedresser," He gave us some carefully presented information about His relationship with the Father. In a vineyard, the vinedresser was the owner and controller. The relationship Jesus described had two specific characteristics. The vinedresser was in complete control of the vines in his field. The vinedresser did everything in his power to enable the vine to produce at its greatest potential. This picture carefully describes the relationship between the Father and the Son.

He who hates Me hates My Father also. John 15:23

This is a continuation of Jesus' attempt to calm His disciples. Jesus repeatedly said that the Father dwelt in Him and He in the Father. He also said that the message He gave was the Father's message. It is, therefore, not surprising that He would also say that when a person hates Him, they hate the Father also. The two are inseparable. He had already convinced them that He was going to die. Now He moved to help them understand that they too would be persecuted. Against this background, Jesus spoke the words recorded here.

Jesus elsewhere said, "I and the Father are one." It is, therefore, no surprise that He would also say, "He who hates Me hates My Father also." It is a way of saying that the Father and the Son are so intimately related that the pagan response to one would of necessity be the same as to the other. There is such a unity in their character, message and work that they became indistinguishable to their detractors.

For to which of the angels did He ever say, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten thee"? And again, "I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me." Hebrews 1:5

The first chapter of Hebrews is the author's attempt to find as many ways as possible to highlight the greatness of Christ. In this chapter, the author quotes from eleven different Old Testament passages that describe the Son as NOT ONLY being greater than the angels, BUT ALSO greater than any person or force in all creation.

In this process, the author used the two quotations found in verse five – Psalm 2:7 and II Samuel 7:14. We have already observed the implications of being a "father" in this culture. As we will see in another part of this study, there are some important implications to being a Son. It involves being subject to the will of the "Father." It also suggests it is the responsibility of the Son to reflect the character of the Father in his daily walk. It involves being totally committed to what the Father is doing and the directions He has chosen. It is essential to determine what effect this picture of the Father has upon our intimate relationship with Him. We have already established that the quality of divine character is a pattern for our own conduct. Indeed, the relationship between the Father and the Son is a pattern to be followed in our intimate relationship with God and each other.

The New Testament gives us a picture of the Father as the source of all being. It is that and more. He is the Almighty Judge; the provider and protector. As He sustained a unity with the Son, He will also be one

THE PICTURE OF THE FATHER

with us. His holy character is impeccably pure as He directs that part of the human family that loves Him more than life. He longs for an intimate relationship with us as finite individuals.

It is essential for us to know, in as much detail as humanly possible, who He is and what He is like if we aspire to share an intimate relationship with Him.

IN REFLECTION

The verses we have considered give us a glimpse of the glory of the father; the glorious One who is eager to share His glory with the Son.

Indeed, the Son honors the Father by accomplishing the Father's will; by speaking the Father's message as His own. The apostle John gives us a picture of the Father as the one giving direction to the life and ministry of Jesus and through this gives direction to our life of service.

The Father is obviously greater than we are. At the same time, He joyfully shares with us the inevitable, oppressive opposition we receive as we carry out His will in ministry.

A few years ago, I was a guest professor at a seminary in Indonesia. One student came a day late. He explained that his father was a pastor. One day there was a knock on the door. The father answered the door. It was the police. They shot him in the forehead because he was a Christian. This son, attended the funeral and came from there to take advanced training so that he could serve the Lord more effectively in the place where his father died. The glory of God was visible on his radiant face.

Jesus said, "as the Father has sent me, so send I you." John 20:21. The relationship between Father and Son forms a vivid pattern for our relationship with the Son. The glory of the Father encircles the lives of those who serve the Lord with gladness, giving no priority to what might happen as a result of their obedience.

THE CHARACTER OF THE FATHER

And perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope... Romans 5:4

This verse speaks of the growing character of the redeemed. The word that is so translated is "dokime". This word literally means approved. It is that which has given evidence that it can stand the test. It describes those who have proven themselves spiritually reliable having stood the test of adversity.

When we speak of the character of God, we refer to those traits or attributes that distinguish Him from all others. It is a way to identify those patterns of life and behavior that are unique to His being. The pagan peoples that Israel encountered on the way from Egypt to Canaan understood something of the character of Jehovah. We will allude to some of these traits as we move through this chapter.

There are a host of New Testament references to the character of God. Some of these references deal specifically with God the Father. This information is crucial for our understanding of how He deals with this relationship. Having said this, we must hasten to add that unlike Romans 5:4, which describes proven character as a step in a process of spiritual growth and maturity, God is never in process, but always complete in His character.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus dealt specifically with what the Father is like. Part of what He said can be found in Matthew 7:7-12

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! Matthew 7:11

In that part of the world, people thought of their idols as capricious, self-serving, willing to harm, but unwilling to meet basic human needs. When Jesus spoke the wonderful words of Matthew 7:7-12, it was almost more than they could grasp. He attempted to explain it more clearly by using the image of the Father. A father, especially a Jewish father would never deceive his son. He would never expose his son to danger. He drew His explanation to a close saying if we as fallen human beings would be so caring for our sons, think what a Holy God would do for you. It explained why He could make such a positive final statement about the way the Father answers prayer.

In this explanation, Jesus gave us some very clear insights into the nature and character of God. God is loving and generous. He is provident beyond our ability to comprehend. This picture of God is the basis of our intimate relationship with Him. The people of the first century could not trust their capricious idols. We can enjoy a personal, intimate relationship with God because by nature, He is loving and caring. He is benevolent beyond our ability to comprehend.

"Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. Matthew 18:14

In three short verses, Matthew 18:12-14, Jesus told another story to help people understand what the Father is like. He told of the shepherd who had 100 sheep, but one was lost. Like the shepherd, God does not want any to perish. He is merciful beyond the ability of human language to describe. This would be a shock to the pagan who heard Jesus speak. Also, Jewish leaders tended to think of God as judgmental and not forgiving. This also would take them by surprise.

There is another element in these verses. **Jesus portrayed the Father as the seeking God.** He goes seeking the lost until He finds them the way a shepherd would pursue a sheep that had wandered away from the flock. Pagan idols were thought to be vengeful and capricious. Jesus portrayed the Father as rejoicing greatly when the lost was found.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." Matthew 24:36

Jesus used the story of a son's wedding to give us an insight into the nature of the Father. It is as if He said, "In the way that only the groom's father knew when his son's wedding would take place, so only the Father

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knows the day and the hour when the Son of Man will come for His bride, the church." This is omniscience. There is much about the future that we cannot know. The Father knows! Now, omniscience is a quality of God's nature, not His character. The way He uses that omniscience to bless and protect us is the quality of His character.

One God and Father of all who is over all and thorough all and in all Ephesians 4:6

In Ephesians, Paul found it necessary to stress the need for unity in the church. By repetition, he stressed the oneness, the singularity of faith. In this verse, he spoke of the Father, saying, "one God, and Father of all." God is unique. He is one and there is none like Him.

In making this statement, however, Paul added another note. Speaking of the Father as "Father of all" he identified the Father as the source of all being. He continued, "over all and through all and in all." This is a beautiful way to highlight the supremacy of the Father over all His creation. Again, Jehovah's supremacy is a quality of His nature. He uses that supremacy to bless us and to bind us to himself and each other. This is part of His character.

Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. James 1:17

James has described the process of temptation in painfully obvious terms. Having said that God does not tempt, he turns his attention to what the Father does. He is overwhelmingly benevolent. Again, this is completely contrary to the way pagans viewed their idols. Modern pagan people are not different. They view their idols not as dependable, but capricious. One never know what to expect from them.

James had an additional word to say about the Father. He said, "with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." This is a way of saying that God is changeless. The reference has to point to the fact that God is also eternal. What He was, He is and will always be. This gives us the right to expect that everything that He was and did in the Old Testament, He is and does now. Otherwise, the Old Testament is just interesting history. Again, this quality of His nature is fundamental to His character. He is not only loving, but he is changelessly loving. He is not only patient, He is eternally patient with our weakness and failures.

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. 1 John 2:13

In His own unique style, John gives us two glimpses of God's nature in this brief verse. John said, "I am writing to you fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning." He said that though the Father is beyond human mental capacity, He is knowable. The reference also points to the fact that God is eternal. There were those who taught otherwise. When John said of the Father, "who was from the beginning," it is a way of saying that God is eternal, that He predates time. That is His nature. The patient, loving way in which He expends His power so generously and lovingly is a glimpse of His holy Character.

IN REFLECTION

The New Testament picture of the Father is one of generosity with His children. It portrays Him as so concerned that He struggles and is unwilling that any person He created would perish. He is totally and powerfully involved in our lives. He is changelessly committed to bestowing blessings upon us despite our flawed condition.

The Biblical pictures of the character of God always serve multiple purposes:

1. It is an attempt to describe the infinite God in terms finite minds can grasp, at least to some extent. In this sense, the Scriptures are God's self-revelation.
2. The pictures of God's character always serve as a pattern for us to follow. Paul alluded to this when he instructed the Ephesian Christians, "be imitators of God." 5:1 If we are going to obey the Scriptural command to be like God, we will have to discover, in the Scriptures, what He is really like.

THE CHARACTER OF THE FATHER

An intimate relationship with God is based upon the people of God becoming holy because He is holy. It grows out of an ongoing discovery of God's self-revelation in the Scriptures and in our daily walk with Him.

DIVINE INITIATIVES

THE FATHER'S INITIATIVE

The point has already been made, that there is a mutualness in the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. That having been established, one must move on to explore the idea that within that mutualness there are occasions when the Father takes initiative to accomplish some facet of His will. There are several situations that draw our attention in this matter.

*"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."
Luke 10:22*

Jesus made this statement following the return of the 70 whom He had sent out to proclaim the Gospel. Observe that He said, "all things have been handed over to Me by My Father." This idea was also recorded in John 13:3. In no reference does Jesus request that all things be handed over to Him. This action is the Father's initiative. In Hebrews 2:8, the author quotes from Psalm 8:6, saying, "Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet." The Hebrews author then said, "For in subjecting all things to Him, he left nothing that is not subject to Him." In each instance, the text suggests this is something the Father did on His own. In one sense, the Father was placing His power and authority on hold by voluntarily placing all power and authority in Jesus. It should be noted, however, that this divine initiative was totally unselfish.

*Jesus therefore said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. 29 "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."
John 8:28-29*

The Jews and Pharisees were challenging and misrepresenting the things Jesus said. Against this background, Jesus made several pertinent statements concerning divine initiative.

- a. "I DO NOTHING ON MY OWN INITIATIVE"
He had made a blanket statement concerning the origin of His ministry. As Jesus often did while teaching, he added clarity to His teaching by saying what He did not mean and then telling them what He did mean. That is His procedure in these verses. He does nothing on His own initiative.
- b. "I SPEAK THESE THINGS AS THE FATHER TAUGHT ME"
Jesus is so in tune with the Father that He speaks, even in the struggle with the Pharisees, the things the Father taught Him to say. This does not mean that the Father is omniscient and Jesus is not. Jesus used the image of the teacher-pupil relationship to describe how the Father takes the initiative in trying to teach the Pharisees who wanted to argue with Him.
- c. "HE WHO SENT ME IS WITH ME"
Jesus continued to describe the way He and His Father collaborate to perform His ministry in the world. It is not that Jesus was alone in the world to speak on behalf of the Father. He is rather saying that the Father is a vital participant in every encounter Jesus made with those who vigorously opposed Him.
- d. "I ALWAYS DO THE THINGS THAT ARE PLEASING TO HIM"
This is a clear picture of Jesus' mode of operation. He does not give thought to what He wants or how He would respond. He is continually seeking to do the things He knows are pleasing to the Father. This is the picture of a servant, a way of life Jesus fulfilled quite naturally and voluntarily.

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does His works." John 14:10

Where Are You ?!

We have talked previously of this verse. I would lift up one statement that deals with our current topic. Jesus said, "I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His work." This statement adds clarity to the other issues we have dealt with in this part of the study. He had just said that He was "in the Father and the Father was in Him." He then said, "The Father abiding in Me does His works." It is not that the Father controls Jesus' action like a puppeteer moves his puppet. It is that He abides in Jesus and does His work through the Son. This is a divine pattern.

And concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold me. John 16:10

Jesus talked about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict of sin, righteousness and judgment. He said the Spirit would convict of righteousness because Jesus was going to the Father. It is a picture of a soldier returning to base for reassignment after a successful campaign. In the past, Jesus had brought conviction concerning righteousness. Now He was being assigned to the Father's right hand to intercede on our behalf. It wasn't that Jesus wanted to leave His disciples. He had been reassigned and was obedient to that call.

You may remember that in Acts chapter eight, Luke tells us,

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road. Acts 8:26

Because of Philip's sensitivity to the message of God, through the angel, the Ethiopian heard the explanation of the Scripture, confessed his faith in Christ and opened a whole new area of the world to the message of the gospel.

IN REFLECTION

All of the Biblical information concerning the Trinity and the relationships within the Trinity are vital to our study because they are the example, the pattern for our character and our relationships with the Father, Son and Spirit. The passages to which we have referred indicate that the Father takes the initiative in accomplishing His will through the Son and Spirit. This is important for our consideration. It establishes a pattern for the way the Father abides in us; takes the initiative to work out His will through our lives, character, conduct and service. In the same way that the Father accomplishes His will through Jesus and His ministry, so the work to which God calls us is accomplished through our lives and ministry as the Father takes up residence in the Son and the Father and Son dwell in our lives to accomplish the Father's will through our service.

Those who are "sanctified," who are set apart for the service of God joyfully present themselves to God for Him to abide in them, to take the initiative and accomplish His perfect will through them. This is the foundation upon which our intimate relationship with God is based. For this privilege we give humble thanks.

THE SON'S INITIATIVE

As we have seen, the Father sometimes took the initiative in divine action. It should be noted, however, that this initiative was often to place everything in the hands of His Son. There are some occasions, however, when the Son initiates divine action.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25:34

This is the picture of Jesus as the Judge. He is portrayed as a king who sits in judgment. This in itself is an initiative. He speaks to the righteous, those on His right hand, and invites them to receive their inheritance. There are some observations that are appropriate here. Observe that these are those who are "blessed by My Father." Even in His judgment, He is affirming the judgment of His Father. Jesus takes the initiative. Observe, however, that He is doing the thing that the Father turned over into His hands.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. John 14:6

The word translated "through" is "dia". It is usually associated with a certain direction. This would not be a reasonable use of the word in this verse. This word is also used to describe "instrumentality." In this verse, one might translate it, "by means of the sacrifice of Jesus." Jesus determines the ones who will be able to come "to the Father." This is not a picture of a certain type of election. By the efficacy of the sacrifice of Jesus, people are uniquely able to come into the Father's presence. We must keep in mind that though Jesus initiated this situation, even this was in obedience to the will of the Father. In their initiatives, the Father and the Son are inseparable from each other.

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:11

Bringing glory to the Father comes only as each one makes confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. There are a host for whom this confession is an announcement of their faith. For still others, however, it is an admission that Jesus Christ is Lord even though they have spent their whole life in denial of that truth. This confession is not the result of intellectual discovery. It is, rather, a response to their experience in their own life. It may also be a tearful observation of the power of Christ's sacrifice transforming a desperate sinner into a holy servant of God. It is the powerful sacrifice of Jesus that initiates an expression of the glory of God on the lips of the "whosoever."

Jesus takes some initiative. It is clear, however, that even in His initiatives, He is in ultimate cooperation with the Father to meet the spiritual and social needs of the people.

This is important in order to gain an understanding of our intimate relationship. Our ultimate commitment is to the accomplishment of the Father's will and to bring Him glory. Within the intimate relationship of the Father and the Son, there are occasions when the Son was called upon to take the initiative to bring about the Father's will and bring Him glory.

In the same way, and because we are in the Father and in the Son, just as Jesus took the initiative and healed on the Sabbath and challenged the evil forces controlling the temple by driving out the money changers, so we are called upon to take the risky kinds of initiatives in order to accomplish His will through our lives.

THE SON'S DEPENDENCE UPON THE FATHER

The moment one uses the word "dependence" some will conjure up a picture of weakness and the inability to function on one's own. This is true in some cases, but certainly not all. There are occasions when one is dependent upon another because of an intense desire to act in concert with the other party. There are some who are dependent upon another because they want to enable the second party to "try his wings" in a safe environment and succeed. There are passages that indicate that Jesus is dependent upon the Father. There are none that indicate this is because of weakness. Indeed, the opposite is true.

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will but as thou wilt. Matthew 26:39

The scene is the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus and His disciples moved to the Mount of Olives to a favorite place of prayer. Jesus, though supported by His inner-circle, moved away to pray alone. He knew what lay ahead. He was also keenly aware that in His pristine holiness, he would accept upon Himself the abject sinfulness of the entirety of mankind, dying in the most shameful way possible. His humanity clung to life as a drowning man grasps at straws. At the same time, His deity clung to its committed obedience to the Father. In the heat of this desperate struggle, Jesus cried out from both perspectives.

He cried out, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." Did Jesus not know if it were possible or not? Certainly He knew! One of the beautiful things about the Scriptures is the fact that the total picture is presented, warts and all. No attempt is made to render the story politically correct or socially acceptable. What you see is what you get. Though He was uniquely God, still He placed Himself completely at the disposal of the Father's will. Jesus held Himself in dependence upon the Father because of His mutual determination to provide redemption for the fallen human race. Jesus spoke of "this cup." Certainly, He held no chalice in His hands as He poured out His heart to the Father. Jews, in that day, collected their tears both of joy and sorrow in a tear cup. These drops of water, wrenched from their eyes, were silent reminders of the triumphs and tragedies of life.

Jesus also cried out in humble submission, "Yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt." This is not a struggling man void of options. Rather, it is the triumph, through tears, of one determined to obey the Father without stopping to count the cost or to interfere with the life Jesus had set apart for the Father's service. You will find this same reference in Luke 22:42

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit." And having said this, He breathed His last. Luke 23:46

These final words tore from the heart and lips of Jesus as He gasped His final breath. What His enemies viewed as the final defeat of a blasphemer was in reality the triumphant whisper of obedient success as Jesus completed the task committed to His care by the Father. Jesus was physically no longer able to carry on. In this moment, Jesus released both His life and sacrificial death into the care of the Father. This is a dependence of strength and beauty. He came to earth knowing from that beginning that His violent death would be the trophy of victory; not defeat as His enemies intended. As patience is the strength to hold oneself in check even when all seems lost, so this dying cry is the strength to die without cause in order that others might live eternally without fear.

The father of a friend lived in the former Soviet Union. He ran a printing ministry that communist authorities knew about, but had not been able to locate. Several times, he would leave by one door as authorities banged on another demanding entrance. Did he know the risks he took? Was he aware of the hardship this could cause for his family? He was keenly aware of the possible consequences. However, he was also aware of the task which lay before him in printing Bibles and Christian literature. It was his response to the will of the Father in the same way as Jesus said, "

Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these

Where Are You ?!

things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and greater works than these will He show Him, that you may marvel. John 5:19, 20

Some might dub this the manipulation of weakness. It is anything but that. In these words, Jesus has stated the dynamic relationship He shared with the Father. It is the picture of dependence expressed in power. In great strength, Jesus held Himself under the control of the Father, to whom He had committed Himself. This is what Paul described in Philippians 2:5-11. In these verses Paul described the humility in which Jesus set aside His majesty in order to place Himself completely at the disposal of the Father. It is not that Jesus lacked the ability to do something on His own. It is that he was able NOT TO do anything at all unless it was a reflection of what the Father was doing – providing redemption for the human race. In powerful humility, Jesus committed Himself to do what He saw the Father doing and only that. It is an agreement worked out in love. The Father reveals to the Son everything He is doing. The Son powerfully presents Himself as a servant to the Father's will and purpose.

But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent me. John 5:36

As in previous verses, Jesus was being targeted for death by the Jews. Jesus' statement in this verse, described a dependence He imposed upon Himself. The Father gave Jesus specific things to which He was to commit His life and strength. Jesus gave Himself totally to the accomplishment of these tasks. In the process of Jesus' personally mandated obedience, these works provide evidence that the Father, in fact, sent Jesus to earth to accomplish their mutual role of redemption. This is dependence. It is a dependence born of the strength and desire of the depending one.

But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and He who sent me. John 8:16

Again, the Pharisees challenged the claims of Jesus. In effect, they called Him a liar. Being the essence of truth, Jesus responded vigorously. Jesus claimed that His judgment is true because He did not act alone. He claimed that He "and the one who sent me" (the Father) acted in concert. This is a situation where a badgered individual would want to assert His total authority in His life. Not Jesus. He rather carefully affirmed that He and the Father acted in concert. This is one more instance where Jesus had the strength to hold Himself in a dependent relationship that was so vital to human redemption.

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. "And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me. John 12:49, 50

These verses spoken only shortly before the Passover celebration, clearly describe Jesus' dependence upon the Father. He said so in so many words. Jesus spoke, but on the initiative of the Father. He announced that the Father had given Him commandment of the things He was to say. The highlight, here, is that Jesus did exactly as the Father commanded Him to do.

Jesus therefore said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:11

This is part of the story of the deceitful way in which Jesus was arrested. Peter, ever the one to act first and think at leisure, had a sword with him and attempted to kill the high Priest's slave. (ever wonder why he had a sword with him?) Peter's bad swordsmanship accounted for his poor attack which netted the servant's ear and not his head.

THE SON'S DEPENDENCE UPON THE FATHER

Jesus finally instructed Peter to put away the sword. He then asked Peter a leading question. He asked, "the cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" The anticipated answer to Jesus' question is a strong "yes!" Wrapped up in this question, however, is a picture of the intimate relationship sustained by Jesus and the Father. Jesus described this relationship in very careful terms. He spoke of "the cup." The Jews spoke of both their experiences of joy and sorrow as "the cup." He was saying, the fact that the Father places this before Me insists that I tackle this dilemma as faithfully as possible. He did not intimate the possibility of discussing the validity of this move. He simply saw the Father's commandment as the instruction to obey.

This has staggering implications for our intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father. The relationship Jesus had with the Father was intended to provide a pattern for our own intimate relationship with them both. It does not mean that if we have an intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father we, too, will be crucified. It does mean that such an intimate relationship will ultimately require that we need to voluntarily place ourselves in the kind of dependence upon the Father that Jesus undertook. In this relationship, we will increasingly exercise the strength of will to maintain that unflinching dependence upon God. It is that commitment that enabled Jesus to insist upon His total obedience to the will and purposes of the Father for the redemption of mankind. Will we suffer death on behalf of Christ? No one can say. God is not necessarily asking us to give up our lives. He commands that we depend upon Him and His will to the point that dying is not beyond the limits of our commitment.

IN REFLECTION

Christ's dependency upon the Father is an expression of strength, not weakness.

This is a self-limitation that Jesus placed upon Himself. He made Himself available to be assigned. He was not forced to do so. Thus, it was possible for this to be a truly cooperative ministry with a single purpose – accomplishing the will of the Father.

The basis of this cooperative mission was mutual love rather than fear or force. Though based upon mutual love, it was costly to both Father and Son. The Father saw His Son die. The Son paid the ultimate price – death.

INTIMACY BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON

As you read through the New Testament, it is increasingly clear that the relationship between the Father and the Son is more than a working relationship aimed toward common goals. There is an intimacy that focuses upon mutual love and respect.

And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for Thee; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what Thou wilt." Mark 14:36

The scene is the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed alone confronting His imminent death. In the depth of His humanity, He clung to life with desperate desire. Out of this clash of the wills within Him, Jesus cried out to the Father to remove "this cup;" this black cloud of impending death from Him. In this prayer, Jesus cried out, "Abba, Father!" To translate these two words into English might sound strange, but they are revealing. "Abba" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "Daddy," the word every Jewish boy employed when addressing his father. The word translated "Father" is the Greek word "pataer," which Greek speaking boys would use to address their father. Jesus' cry was like saying, "Daddy! Daddy!" We must keep in mind Jesus was not refusing to carry out the Father's plan of redemption. He was, in the best sense, a Son. Indeed, Jesus frankly said, "not what I will, but what thou wilt." His humanity, however, cried out for an alternative to this excruciating death.

By the same token, the Father was not rejecting His Son in this cataclysmic exchange. In the very best sense, He was holding fast to everything within Him to be Father. This is the glorious reality behind this tense encounter in the garden.

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. John 3:35

John the Baptist was an amazing man. From a human standpoint John was a cousin to Jesus. Still, he was able to carefully speak of Him as the Son of God. In the midst of his statement, John gave us two pieces of information about the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father.

a. THE FATHER LOVES THE SON

The word translated "loves" is the word "agapae." It describes an expression of love that is limitless and self-sacrificing. It is an active expression rather than a responsive one. This is total love with no strings attached. You see this same message in John 5:20 and John 10:17

b. "(THE FATHER) HAS GIVEN ALL THINGS INTO HIS HANDS."

It is the Father's design to work all things through the Son. There may have been a number of ways the Father could have revealed Himself to fallen mankind, but He chose to have people see the example of His Son and realize that when they had seen Jesus, they had discovered what the Father was like. The same could be said for the sustaining of creation and the redemption of mankind. This statement indicates the unequivocal trust the Father has for the Son. It also demonstrates that their relationship is devoid of the struggle for power. The Father chose to give control of everything into the hands of the Son.

But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go from here. John 14:31

In the previous verse we observed the love of the Father for the Son. In this verse, Jesus is comforting His disciples and in doing so, He gives us two insights into that intimate relationship.

a. "I LOVE THE FATHER"

Again, the word used for "love" is "agapae." Jesus said his love for the Father had no conditions or reservations. This active form of love had no prerequisites. He loved the Father just because He loved Him.

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b. "AS THE FATHER GAVE ME COMMANDMENTS SO I DO"

This is a blanket statement of obedience. Though the Father gave everything into Jesus' care, still Jesus was totally obedient to every command of the Father. More than this, the statement also speaks of Jesus' total trust in the direction and purpose of the Father. Elsewhere in John chapter 14, Jesus pointed to obedience as the evidence of our love for Him. Here is evidence that what He stated as a requirement for us was lifestyle for Him. There is absolute harmony in the relationships described in this verse.

Again, the actions and relationships within the Trinity reflect God's loving intention concerning our intimate relationship with the Trinity. As the Father loved the Son, so the Son loved the Father. As the Father and the Son love us, so we are intended to constantly and increasingly love the Father and the Son. This is awe-inspiring.

There is more. As the Father committed all things into the care of the Son to carry out the will of the Father, so God commits the care of the body of Christ into our hands in order to accomplish His will. It is difficult to read these words sitting down. One wants to fall upon one's knees when realizing how great a part self-interest has played in our conduct of the church.

"For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. John 5:26-27"

Jesus had healed the man at the pool of Bethesda. The fact that He did this on the Sabbath infuriated the Pharisees. To make matters worse, in their eyes, He called God His Father.

Jesus, in verse 26, spoke of the Father having life in Himself. This is a unique situation. We are all recipients of life, but only He has life in Himself. Jesus went on to say that the Father, "gave to the Son also to have life in Himself." There is no scramble for powerful uniqueness in the relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus did not request this power. The Father gave it to Him. The Father wanted Jesus to have this power. This also suggests an unimaginable level of trust that bound the two together.

In verse 27, Jesus described another miraculous fact about this relationship between the Father and the Son. Though the Father has control over all that He created, still He voluntarily gave Jesus the total authority to execute judgment. There is a level of trust and unselfish sharing in this relationship that is beyond our comprehension. This is a picture of a totally shared control and ministry. Because Jesus is the Son of man, the Father gave him life in Himself to enable Him to carry out His anointed ministry.

"I and the Father are one." John 10:30

This is a profound, but very simple statement. Historically, some have misunderstood this verse to mean that Jesus was just another name for the Father. That is not what Jesus was saying. In another chapter, we describe marriage as two becoming one. No one would say that this picture suggests that the bride is another name for the groom. It rather describes a cooperative unity in which each partner harmoniously makes their contribution to the life of the relationship. This is exactly what Jesus was suggesting concerning His relationship to the Father. In so doing, He suggested a level of unity and harmonious cooperation between Himself and the Father that is beyond description. If one meditates on this statement of Jesus, the suggestions are staggering.

"But if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." John 10:38

Jesus' answer, in the previous verse study, so enraged the Jews that they collected stones to stone Him to death for what they considered blasphemy. Jesus' closing statement in this verse is awe-inspiring – "the Father is in Me and I am in the Father." As we indicated in the chapter on "being in Christ," the word "in" has two connotations.

- a. The most common use of the word "in" is to identify a specific location. If I put a book "in" my pocket, the word "in" describes the location of the book.

INTIMACY BETWEEN THE FATHER AND THE SON

- b. As previously indicated, the word "in" was also used to identify and describe a relationship, a sphere of influence. In this case, "in" describes a relationship rather than a location. That is what Jesus has described. If Jesus had simply said, "I am in the Father," then it would indicate that the relationship between the Father and the Son was so intimate and harmonious that the Father held influence over everything the Son did. Here, however, Jesus described a situation where the Father and the Son were mutually "in" each other. This describes such a harmonious, intimate relationship that it is not possible to discern a difference between the actions and influence of both Father and Son. We also should keep in mind that passages like John 14:10, 11 describe this relationship in exactly the same way. Indeed, when this relationship is described in the New Testament, this is the way in which it appears.

This is tremendously important to our understanding of our intimate relationship with God and each other. It is God's desire to be so completely in us and for us to be so completely in Him that it becomes impossible to discern the difference between His actions and ours. It appears that this is indeed what happened at Pentecost. It is also what happened when Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin and God gave them words to say in their defense. In the Old Testament, it is what Elijah experienced when the challenge was made to show whether God or Baal should be worshipped.

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Like a beautiful gem, this relationship has a number of facets. The one which is most prominent is that of "harmony." It is not that the Father and the Son do the same thing. It is, rather, that as each performs their particular task, these are so pointedly focused on a common goal and purpose that they become indistinguishable from each other.

This intimate relationship expresses itself in mutual love. The Father loves the Son and expresses that agapae love in trust. He grants the Son both power and authority. The Son loves the Father and expresses this agapae love in obedience.

The intimacy of this relationship is expressed in relation to power. Unlike many human relationships, this is devoid of struggle for power. The issue is the quality of selflessness in relationship to this power. Again, it is more than sharing power. It is volunteering to share rather than needing to share.

There is a cooperative unity that human language expresses with great difficulty. This unity is so seamless and complete that the actions of Jesus reveal what the Father is like.

If you reflect on these summaries, you will discover at least two things: 1. It gives a glimpse of the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. 2. It provides an insight into the relationship God wishes to share with us and for us to share with the triune God.

This is holy ground, to be sure. Angels would long just to glimpse into this holy scene.

What a privilege it is to listen in when the faultlessly holy God and His sinless Son commune in the midst of that breath-taking act of redemption.

Jesus called the omnipotent God of the universe "daddy." When I reflect on what it meant when I came to my earthly father and called him "daddy," memories flood into my mind of the comfort it brought when I was frightened or when life simply fell apart for a little boy. Realizing that this is a tiny glimpse of what the relationship between the Father and Son is like, I can weep, but words totally fail me. Awed silence is the only appropriate response. I feel good.

I understand, on a different level, when my grown children call me on the phone and say, "daddy?!" How does one describe the love and compassion one feels at such a time? It is nothing short of astounding to realize that with all my weaknesses, my heavenly Father wants me to gain even a glimpse of that beautiful, intimate relationship with His Son. It is yet more astounding to grasp that He longs for me to share that most intimate, holy relationship with Them.

It stretches the mind to the breaking point to think that it is possible for us to share in the work of God so intimately that it is not humanly possible to separate that which is done by the Father and the Son from that which is done by you and me as They work through us. Angels folded their wings when standing in His

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awesome presence. With no wings to fold, we stand in awed silence with only our tears to express the inexpressible.

THE TRINITY IN CONCERT

We have been looking at situations where the Father and the Son have worked in concert on behalf of the saints. There are a number of places in the New Testament where the Trinity works in an intimate, harmonious relationship on our behalf. We want to look carefully at some of these.

*"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;
John 14:16*

In this verse, Jesus described the actions of the Father Son and Spirit. The Father is the one Jesus petitioned. He is ultimately in charge. The Holy Spirit is the one Jesus identified as "another Helper" or "Comforter." Jesus requested of the Father; the Father sent the Holy Spirit. There is a harmonious cooperative ministry whereby the Trinity works in concert to meet the needs of the saints.

And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. Romans 8:10-11

In these two verses, you see the Trinity at work in the life of the person who is "in Christ." Observe what Paul said about the actions of the Trinity.

A. CHRIST

The body may be dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of His righteousness in us. This is only possible because of the redemption which has been made available to us by the sacrifice of Christ.

B. THE FATHER

He raised Jesus from the dead.

He gives life to our mortal bodies.

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT

He dwells in us.

He is the agent through whom the Father gives us life.

If you observe this list carefully, you see the Trinity functioning in harmonious unity. What the Father is doing, the Spirit accomplishes in our lives. What Jesus brings about in us is an accomplishment of the Father's will for us.

The intimate, harmonious relationship of the Trinity is on our behalf. The harmonious working relationship within the Trinity is an example of the way we should relate to each other. It is also a demonstration of how we should participate when we are "in the Father, Son and Spirit."

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. Romans 8:14-17

Again, in these verses, Paul identified the way in which the Trinity works harmoniously on our behalf. It is interesting to observe the things that each member of the Trinity does as we take up residence in Them.

A. THE FATHER

1. He gives us freedom

2. He gives us the spirit of adoption as sons. (The use of the word "sons," in the text or in this document, should not be mistaken for a sexist statement. In that culture, the daughters did not

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inherit, the sons did. Our position in the family of God is more than just being members of the family. It also includes being an inheritor. We are spoken of as "joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.")

3. He enables us to claim Him personally – "Abba, Father." The Greek word "abba" is the transliteration of Hebrew word for "daddy." On the other hand, "pater" is the Greek word that is also translated "daddy." Together, these two words give strong emphasis to the fact that the Father opens to us the privilege of being His children with all the privileges and responsibilities involved.
4. He grants us to be His heirs.

B. THE SON

1. He accepts us as fellow heirs of God.
2. He enables us to suffer with Him.
3. He enables us to be glorified with Him.

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. He is our leader and guide.
2. He brings us to sonship with the Father. (Again, as mentioned on the previous page, this is more than simply being brought into the family. It involves being an inheritor as well.) In that culture, daughters did not inherit. They, rather, benefited from their husband's inheritance.)
3. He bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

In these verses, you see the characteristics of the ministry of each member of the Trinity. Note, especially, that the ministry of the Spirit, as we abide in Them, is to enable our relationship with the Father and the Son. The ministry of each one functions on our behalf.

Observe, also, how harmoniously each one works with the other two members to enhance our lives as members of the family of God. The work of the Holy Spirit affirms that the sacrifice of Christ is effective in bringing us into the intimate family of God.

This is tremendously significant. As indicated earlier, the intimate, harmonious activity of the Trinity, on our behalf, is a model for our participation. It models the way we should function as we are in Them. It models the way we are a part of each other's ministry, just as the members of the Trinity are a part of the ministry each unselfishly performs. I am not sure that this is widely practiced in our time.

*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.
Galatians 4:6-7*

Some of the Galatians had returned to their former way of life. Paul was trying to reason with them to point out just how foolish this is. In the process, he described what great things the Trinity had done for them and upon which they are turning their backs.

Again, observe the cooperative part each member of the Trinity plays in our spiritual journey.

A. THE FATHER

He sent the Spirit of Christ into our hearts.

B. THE SON

It is His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who guides us into deeper understanding of our sonship with the Father.

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT

He leads us to say "Abba, Father." It is to claim our family position as God's sons. It is to acknowledge the intimate, personal relationship into which the Father has urgently invited us.

One way to increase our awareness of the greatness of this gift is to contemplate what we would miss if the Trinity did not perform these ministries in harmony with each other.

1. If God did not send His Spirit into our hearts, there would be no way to receive His guidance and His teaching for our lives.

THE TRINITY IN CONCERT

2. If Christ's Spirit did not guide us, we would be totally unaware of our privileges and responsibilities as sons of God.
3. The Spirit would not cry with us, "Abba, Father." The value of this is not in the Spirit's saying these words. Rather, in saying these words, He opens to us the opportunity to discover the intimate relationship of being sons when once we had been slaves.
4. It enables us to grasp, to some small extent, just how much God loves us and the greatness of the position to which He invites our unworthy presence.

And might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:16-18

Paul delighted to explain to the Ephesian "saints" the great privileges that are ours in Christ. Again, in these verses, Paul described this harmonious ministry of the Trinity in making the will and power of God available in us. Observe what each accomplishes.

A. THE SON

1. He brought us near to the Father by His blood v. 13
2. He is our peace v. 14
3. He brought the message of peace to all peoples. v. 17
4. He abolished the enmity between Jew and Gentile by making us part of His body. v. 14, 16
5. He reconciled us to the Father through His blood. v. 15
6. He is the avenue of our access to the Father. v. 18

B. THE FATHER

1. He is described as the one to whom our petitions are addressed and who would answer them in love. v. 18
2. The Father restores us to His family because of the cross of His Son. v.16
3. He offers access to us. This is the description of the ministry of prayer and fellowship that we share with the Father. v. 18
4. His reconciliation of the Jew and Gentile places all redeemed human beings in one body and thus transforms our relationship with each other as well as with Him. v. 18

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. He is the agent through whom our access to the Father is carried out.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. I Peter 1:2-5

The apostle Peter wrote two special letters encouraging the people to live holy lives as they participate in the divine nature. These people had been marginalized, cut off from the main stream of their society because of their stand for Christ. Peter spoke to them as aliens who had to scatter throughout that part of the world because of the intensity of the persecution and threats they received as they shared the sufferings of Jesus. In these verses, you can see the Trinity harmoniously at work. This is what Peter said about each member of the trinity.

A. THE SON

Where Are You ?!

1. He caused us to be born again. v. 3
2. He was resurrected. v. 3
3. He is One to be obeyed. v. 2
4. He sacrificed His life for us. v.2
5. He gives grace and peace in fullest measure. v.2

B. THE FATHER

1. He has foreknowledge. v. 2
2. He is the Father of Jesus. v. 3
3. He caused us to be born again to a living hope. v. 3
4. He resurrected Jesus. v. 3
5. He protected the redeemed by His power. v. 3
6. He is characterized by His great mercy. v. 3

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. He is the Sanctifier. v.2
2. He enables us to obey the commands of Christ. V.2

IN REFLECTION

As we reflect upon these discoveries, it becomes obvious that the Holy Spirit does not appear to be as active as the Father and the Son. Indeed, it is as if the Holy Spirit is the silent partner in the workings of the Trinity. He seldom takes the initiative. He rather affirms and enables the initiatives of the Father and the Son. He brings to our attention the things that the Father and the Son secure on our behalf. He is our instructor who clarifies that which the Father and the Son teach. He is our guide to fulfill the Father's will. He opens our understanding to clarify for us the intimate relationship to which the Father and Son invite us. He provides our access to the Father through Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit does not often take the initiative as do both the Father and the Son. You will see this, however, in Acts 10:19, 44; Acts 13:2 and 16:6. Think, however, what would be missing if the Holy Spirit suddenly ceased making the marvelous contributions to our lives that He does so inconspicuously. It is this harmonious effort where each member of the Trinity does His part that makes the beautiful ministry of God so powerful and fulfilling in our lives.

The Son provides a pattern for our relationship with the Father and the Son. In the same fashion, the united efforts of the Trinity provide a pattern for us to follow in our relationships with each other.

JOINT ADMINISTRATION

"And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Luke 24:49

Jesus spoke of sending "the promise of the Father." He spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit. One wonders why, if the Spirit's coming is the promise of the Father, why doesn't the Father send Him? Elsewhere in this study, we pointed out that the Father has placed all things into the hands of the Son. If the Father had sent the Spirit, then He would not have kept His word of placing all things into the hands of His Son. It is a way of affirming that the Father did in fact place everything in the hands of Jesus. He, also, scrupulously guards the relationship He established by this announcement. Jesus described a relationship where both the Father and the Son see this as an opportunity to enhance the ministry of the other. Being in the Father and in the Son, we are a vital part of the unselfish, mutually serving relationship. In a very selfish world, this is a breath of fresh air.

"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44

Here again, is a beautiful picture of Deity working together. The mutual participation of Father and Son is obvious. However, notice the way Jesus said this, "Unless the Father who sent me draws him." It is clear elsewhere that the Father draws people unto Himself through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is really a picture of the Trinity working in concert to bring about the redemption of a lost soul. Once more, being in Christ and in the Father, we are also in the Spirit as He draws the lost to the Father and in so doing makes available that great redemption which is in Christ Jesus. It is awe inspiring that we, as children of God, are permitted to be not observers, but participants in the drama of redemption.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Paul spoke very carefully in these verses. He made two very specific statements. Paul listed several things the Father has already done. He loved them. He gave them eternal comfort. He also gave them "good hope by grace." The eternal comfort the Father gave them is an expression of their restoration to God in redemption. Paul also talked about "good hope by grace." It is by grace that we are saved from our sins. Our hope is not exclusively in the here and now, but in his eternal presence. This is ours by the grace of God.

The second statement involved Paul's petition of both the Father and the Son on behalf of the Thessalonian church. First Paul asked the Father and the Son to bring comfort to these Thessalonian Christians. They had struggled and were in serious need of the comfort which the Father and the Son could provide. The second request Paul made of the Father and the Son was that their hearts would be strengthened for every good word and every good work. This strengthening takes place when the power of God, through the Son, is applied to their apparently insurmountable problems.

"And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name John 16:23

The phrase "in my name" is widely misused in the church. In most instances, Christians conclude their prayers with the words, "in Jesus' name we pray." That was not Jesus' intent in these words. The phrase "in my name" means under my authority. We have His permission to ask for these things before the Father. The cooperative ministry is obvious. Jesus grants permission; the Father grants the request. Without Jesus' permission, the request will not be granted. For instance, if one should ask God to make him exceedingly rich, just to be wealthy and conclude that prayer with the words "in Jesus name we pray," that request will not be answered in the affirmative because Jesus would not approve such a request.

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Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you... 1 Thessalonians 3:11

Paul was eager to visit the Thessalonian church. Observe that he calls upon both the Father and the Son to direct his journey to visit these Christian friends. Paul has carefully described a cooperative effort between the Father and the Son. We must keep in mind that we previously reported that the Father placed all things in the hands of the Son. This does not mean, however, that the Father does nothing. In another place, Jesus said, "the Father works until now and I work." This is a picture of shared responsibility and effort. The text does not identify how this division of labor has been worked out. Paul does not indicate what he wishes the Father and the Son to do in bringing him to Thessalonica. He simply asks that both bring this to pass.

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 6:23

Again, Paul called upon both the Father and the Son to bring about his desired goal. As before, he does not suggest what each should do. He calls upon Father and Son to jointly bring "peace and love with faith" on behalf of the Ephesian Christians.

Notice that Paul did not say, "peace, and love and faith." He said "peace and love with faith." It is a way of saying that without faith there will be no love or peace. Again, if faith is present, love must also be in evidence.

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Timothy 1:2

Paul opened several of his epistles wishing the recipients grace, mercy and peace from the Father and the Son. One might think that Paul was suggesting that one alone was incapable of providing these blessings. That was not Paul's intent. The provision of grace involves the ministry of both the Father and the Son. Mercy finds its origin in the Father, but the sacrifice that releases God's mercy in our lives was performed by the Son. God's peace is present in both the Father and the Son. The mutual administration of both the Father and the Son is a divine choice, not a necessity.

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2

In these verses, Paul used an image that was very well known in that day. There were two ways of understanding the word "advocate." Then as now, an attorney was sometimes known as an advocate. In the king's throne room, the one who represented the cause of the accused was called his "advocate." The word translated "advocate" is "parakletos" which is often used to identify the Holy Spirit. This gives one an insight into the reason Jesus, on one occasion, said the Father would "send you another comforter." This picture of Jesus is particularly appropriate. Jesus' mission now is to intercede on our behalf. Just as an attorney intercedes before the judge on behalf of his client. In these verses, John portrays the Father as the Judge/King and Jesus as the one who intercedes on our behalf. By divine design, the Father sent the Son to make propitiation for our sins. The word translated "propitiation" is "hilasmos" which means "to expiate" or "appease." The New Testament changed it from an attempt to attain the good will of the gods to an effort on the part of God to remove the barrier that sin raises between God and His estranged children.

Jesus' mission is to intercede on our behalf. This is the harmonious mutual administration that was designed to set us free from our sins.

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 2 John 9

JOINT ADMINISTRATION

John described an interesting scenario. Elsewhere in our study it was noted that "abide" described a relationship rather than a location. If I do not abide – take up residence – in the teachings of Jesus, then I do not have the Father in me. On the other hand, if I take up residence, live in the teachings of Jesus, I have both the Father and the Son. In both scenarios, you have this harmonious cooperative relationship between the Father and the Son. In the first, taking up residence, living in the teachings of Jesus forms the criteria for the presence of the Father. In the second situation, abiding in the teachings of Jesus involves one in this intimate, harmonious relationship of both being in Jesus and being in the Father.

'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. Revelation 3:5

In this passage, Jesus gave a series of promises to the church at Sardis. His promises were these:

- a. The overcomers will be clothed in white garments. The color white is the symbol of purity. He was talking about overcoming the evil one.
- b. He promised not to erase the overcomers from the book of life. The Jews understood that if they took part in the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, their name would be recorded in the book of life. To have one's name removed from the book of life was considered the ultimate disgrace.
- c. He promised to confess the overcomers' name before the Father and His angels. The word "confess" is a translation of the Greek word "homologeō" and means "to speak like" or "to affirm by announcement." To confess the person's name is not like confessing sins. It is a way to announce before the Father that here, indeed, is one who endured the temptation and attack of the evil one and was victorious.

It is clear that the Son makes the recommendation and the Father acts upon that recommendation. Though each has a separate function to perform, their actions are mutual and harmonious. This has a direct bearing upon one's understanding of what it means to be in the Father and in the Son. It also gives us a glimpse into the beautiful relationship with the Son and the Father into which we have been invited to participate.

It is essential that we consider what implications this poses for our mutual participation in the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son. Again, the relationship of the Son with the Father is the pattern, the foundation of our understanding of our own participation in that relationship.

Jesus became a joint participant with the Father in carrying out the Father's will to provide redemption for the human race. And in the Spirit's power, we must understand that if we share in that joint administration, then the Father's will and purpose must become the pattern for our participation as well.

Jesus totally invested Himself in the ministry of bringing people into a saving relationship with God. If we participate in this intimate relationship, the Father's purposes will call us to mutual participation with the Father and the Son.

Jesus was available totally to participate in this joint administration. He held nothing back, including Himself. If I participate in this intimate relationship, then I will be involved in His life and ministry. It may result in my participation in the teaching ministry of the church. It may require that one carry the good news as a missionary to a place where they have not heard the gospel message. There will be a mission for every person who participates in this intimate relationship. There will be absolutely no place for us to be a spectator in the body of Christ.

In these pictures of the joint ministry between Father, Son and Spirit, God has shown us not only how They function, but also how He intends that we serve jointly with Them. This is an element of truth that has not as yet found great participation among the people in the body of Christ.

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This joint administration in a means to enhance the ministries of both the Father and the Son. It is more than two ministries working seamlessly together; it is a single ministry with two distinct entities serving together. There are a host of illustrations of this: The Father draws people for the Son to raise; prayer is answered by the Father under the authority of the Son; The guiding and direction of our lives is

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accomplished jointly by the Father and the Son: Jesus is our advocate before the Father; If we abide in Christ's teaching, we have both the Father and the Son.

There are a host of benefits that accrue in our lives because the Father and the Son work together in our lives. We are strengthened, and receive peace, love, faith, grace, mercy and one day Jesus will present the overcomers before the throne of the Father. One stands in awe and reverence before such mutual blessing and service.

MUTUAL INTIMACY

In this part of the study, we are viewing some very intimate, delicate relationships. Before we can view what the New Testament says about this, we need to describe, if not define, what the authors mean by the statements they make.

By mutual intimacy, we refer to those passages where the Biblical authors speak of **our being in Christ** and **He in us**. The fact that they state it in this way suggests that the two phrases have two separate connotations.

When they spoke of our being in Christ or in the Father, they of necessity speak of the quality of life required for us to be "in Him." The Father and the Son are holy in their essential nature. They cannot countenance that which is unholy. If we would abide in Them, then at least we must be holy in two senses of the word. The word usually translated "holy" means "set apart for God." This comes from the Old Testament sacrifices. The proper animal was chosen and set apart for God's exclusive service. In the same way, the sons of Levi were set apart for the exclusive service of God as priests. They were available for no other vocation.

Holy also referred to the cleansing away of all defilement; all that would be offensive to God. The Scriptures clearly teach this on several occasions.

But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourself in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" I Peter 1:15,16 (quoting from Leviticus 11:44; 19:2 ; 20:7)

Again, if Jesus and/or the Father are to abide in us, there must be a harmonious relationship. As the Scriptures say, "two cannot walk together except they agree." There must be a harmonious dedication to the things God is committed to accomplish in order that they might work in concert with Him to achieve those goals. There must be a personal commitment to obedience to the will of the Father if indeed He is to take up residence in our lives. There may be a number of other factors involved, but those listed here form a bare minimum.

That is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. John 14:17

The word translated "know" in this verse and in 14:20 is "ginosko". The word means knowledge that is steadily increasing.

In this chapter, Jesus was comforting His disciples after convincing them that He was going to die. He promised to ask the Father to send them "another helper," one to be for them what He had been for more than three years. Jesus spoke of this divine presence in two ways:

a. "HE ABIDES WITH YOU"

This identifies a common, intimate relationship in which the Father is "with us." It involves a cooperative willingness to be an active part of what God wills to do in the world in the same way that Jesus set aside His majesty in order to be the sacrificial servant needed to accomplish the Father's will among our fallen race. As God sought the fellowship of our first parents, so He seeks after us to share intimately in His fellowship. He is eager to be "with us."

b. "(HE) WILL BE IN YOU"

Jesus has described the way the Father accomplishes what we described above as "with you." The Father accomplishes His will through the holy, committed person and the work of those He indwells. God did not speak to the Ethiopian eunuch, but sent Philip to accomplish the task on His behalf. Again, God did not teach the jailer at Philippi. Rather, He sent Paul as a prisoner through whose suffering and misuse He could speak to the jailer and his family.

Just contemplating what this verse says fills one with awe and gratitude. Think of it. God wants to spend every moment of every day "with us." God is eager to take up residence in our lives every moment of every

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day. This enables Him to participate in every thought, word and action of our lives. **God wills to do His every act through those in whom He dwells.**

"In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." John 14:20-21

Jesus spoke of Himself saying, "I am in My Father." There is an intimate harmony of person and purpose between Jesus and His Father. They are mutually holy. They have all qualities of character in common. This is, in part, what Jesus meant when he said, "if you have seen me you have seen the Father." Being "in the Father" involves bringing His values into agreement with those of the Father. In the Garden, Jesus prayed, "if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." The Father's design was that Jesus should die on behalf of fallen humanity. Jesus was looking for an alternative he did not find. Only when He was prepared to fully participate in the Father's will could it be said that He was "in the Father."

Jesus said, "You are in Me." As previously indicated, this requires that the person be holy and in harmony with the Lord's purposes. Being "in Christ" suggests that we are a part of everything that He does at all times. Just as Jesus and the Father had all qualities of character in common, so when we are in Him, it is equally essential that we share all qualities of character in common.

He also said, "And I in you." The Lord indwells those who are obedient to His word and examples. He indwells those who are in harmony with His mission and purpose in the world.

If Jesus is in the Father and we are in Him, and He is in us, then it follows that we are also in the Father. It is clear in Genesis that God created human beings in order to share in fellowship with them. God went looking for Adam and Eve in the cool of the day to fellowship with them. Our first parents devastated that fellowship when they disobeyed God's command. In John 14:20, 21, you have a picture of the restoration of that fellowship. Believers in obedience to God's commands and in harmony with His will experience the restoration of that relationship to what God intended it to be. This is awe-inspiring, to say the least. As we are obedient and in harmony with God's plans and purposes, we have the rare privilege of being a vital part of all God is doing. This verse gives us an insight into what Peter meant when he said,

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Peter 1:4

The word translated "partakers" is "koinonos". It means "to have in common." It identifies a "companion," "a partner." It is "to share." Peter is talking about the divine nature. Through these precious promises, we have received the privilege of being a participant in the divine nature. It does not mean that we become divine. It does mean that we share in common that nature and character which identifies deity. It means that we partner with God, in this divine nature, so that when people watch carefully the way we live, they will know something about what God is like. Hebrews 1:1-4 teach that Jesus is the self-revealing message from God. This is what Jesus meant when he said,

"...He who has seen me has seen the Father..." John 14:9

In John 14:21, Jesus also described the results of our abiding.

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him. John 14:21

- a. It means that we give evidence that we love the Lord.
- b. If we love the Lord, the Father will love us also.
- c. The Lord will love us.

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d. The Lord will disclose Himself to us.

Some people have the notion that one can discover the greatness of Jesus simply by intensive study. Intense study can be good, but it is not enough. The disclosure of Jesus is not a goal to be achieved by hard study. It rather comes as a by-product of unending love of Jesus and obedience to His commands. The greater our demonstrated love for Him, the more clearly we discover His greatness.

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. John 15:9

We are fascinated by the relationship between the Father and the Son. We wonder what that love relationship is like. Jesus gives us an idea about what it is like. He draws a comparison. He said, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you." If we carefully observe the love of Christ displayed in our lives, we will know exactly what the Father's boundless love for Jesus is like. It is appropriate to say that we share exactly the same love Jesus experienced. Now if we could only express in words all that this involves!

Jesus concluded the verse with a command, "abide in My love." This is a very strong command. One might say it, "make sure you abide in my love." It is His intent that we never stop experiencing the love that is the same as the Father's love for Him.

That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. John 17:21

This is part of Jesus' High Priestly prayer. In this paragraph, Jesus talked about the condition of His followers. They follow Jesus and it is not surprising that the non-Christian world treats them in exactly the same way they treated Jesus.

Notice what Jesus said, "That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." Jesus is saying that one of the results of the mutual intimacy is unity. This is interesting. Many churches have a problem of disunity. They often try to solve that problem by getting to know each other better, by talking through their differences. Jesus' point is clear. As He abides in the Father and the Father abides in Him there is oneness. As members of Christ's body experience disunity, they can change it to unity by abiding in the Father and Son and letting Them abide in us. Unity takes form as we abide in each other as we abide in God and He in us.

Jesus concluded the verse by saying, "that the world may know that Thou didst send Me." All too often we try to refine logical statements to convince the world that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Belief in Jesus does not come at the conclusion of a logical argument. It comes as Jesus abides in the Father and the Father abides in Him. It comes as we abide in Jesus and as He takes up permanent residence in us.

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3

In this verse, John describes our intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father as a "fellowship." The word translated "fellowship" is "koinonia". This is not a socializing event. It is an expression of mutual participation, a common mutual feeling. It is an intimate bond that enables the mutual participation of all members of the body of Christ. John was saying that this mutual participation is energized by mutual agapae love. This is what we share with the Father and the Son. This being the case, the most obvious relationship between the body and God and the body with itself is love without boundaries. The first century evaluation of the church is so appropriate, "behold how they love one another." John was saying that as we share in common with fellow believers we also are sharing that same love with the Father and the Son. There is an inclusiveness in our vertical and horizontal relationship in the church. In too many cases, the horizontal relationship tends to be very private and exclusive. That kind of fellowship one may not share with God because His determination is always to make us inclusive.

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As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 1 John 2:24

In this paragraph, John talks about those who stray from the teachings they received when first they came to Christ. John was saying to these believers that if they retain the teachings they first received, they will abide in the Father and the Son. It is a way of saying to them that a proper understanding of the faith, which protects one from false doctrines, is a vital ingredient in abiding in the Father and the Son and the Father and the Son abiding in us. Some have suggested that our beliefs are not too important so long as we have faith. John is taking exception to that position saying that it is absolutely vital that we know what we believe and that we believe what the scriptures teach.

And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. 1 John 3:24

In the course of his writing in Scripture, John identifies several ingredients in this mutual intimacy. In this verse, he points to the need for obedience. Several New Testament passages clearly teach this truth. Even if they did not, it would still be an obvious necessity. If Jesus is to dwell in us, then we must be in harmony with His task and purpose. This cannot be accomplished without obedience.

John continued, "We know by this that He abides in us by the Spirit whom He has given us." Our indwelling in God must not be by guesswork. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to clarify for us whether or not we abide in Him and He in us.

IN REFLECTION

If we reflect upon the mutual intimacy we share with Jesus and the Father, it is evident that many blessings come to us thereby. In a world torn by hate and strife, we are privileged to share in harmony and oneness with God as we abide in Him and He abides in us. Because of this mutual abiding, we know the Spirit of truth, but others cannot. (John 14:17) We share a love relationship with the Father and the Son. (John 14:21) We are in harmony with who God is and what He is doing in the world. Because of this, we will also be in harmony with other members of the body of Christ. (John 14:21) Jesus taught that He was in the Father, the believer is in Him and He is in the believer. This is a picture of the restored fellowship with God that was severely damaged by the Fall. Because of this mutual abiding, the world can look at the quality of our lives and clearly understand that the Father sent the Son to redeem our fallen race. A stanza of an old hymn, by Charles H. Gabriel, floods the memory as we contemplate this mutual intimacy.

*I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene.
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner condemned unclean.*

*How marvelous, how wonderful,
And my song shall ever be
How marvelous, how wonderful
Is my savior's love for me.*

Quoted from THE HYMNAL FOR WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION, by word music, Waco, Texas

JESUS' RELATIONSHIPS – A FORETASTE

A roadmap for our relationships with Him

'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. Revelation 3:21

As you study the New Testament, you become aware that the description of the relationship between Jesus and the Father is foretaste of precisely the same relationship He longs to share with us. It places the indescribable relationship in terms that we can understand. It also enables us to comprehend that if Jesus is in the Father and we are in Him, then we are also in the Father. The depth and meaning of this truth causes one to stand in awe and silence. We want to pursue that discovery in this section.

The scriptures show how Christ's relationship with the Father is a pattern for our relationship with Them by the use of parallel statements. In the Revelation, John wrote to the Laodicean church. In this quotation, there are two parallels:

- a. First parallel – Jesus is speaking. He compared the results of conduct.

"He who overcomes, as I also overcame."

- b. Second parallel – He compared the rewards for successful conduct.

"I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne as I sat down with My Father on His throne."

It is difficult to fully grasp all that is involved when Jesus said, "I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." The fact that He will deal with us in the same manner in which the Father dealt with Him is a source of great joy and encouragement. It also is most helpful in giving us at least some understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is exciting to know this, but it is also most helpful. It provides an insight into the relationship between the Father and the Son. In the same manner that the Father shared power and authority with Jesus, He will share power and authority with us. We do not know when that will be or how that power and authority will impact lives. That Jesus would share power and authority with us is as certain as the fact that the Father shared these with Him. There will come a day when the redeemed will sit upon the throne with Christ and reign with Him.

If we are to grow spiritually, we will have to increase in our likeness to the Lord. Actually, spiritual growth is becoming increasingly like our Lord.

"In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." John 14:20-21

In these awe-inspiring verses, Jesus drew back the curtain on divine relationships. He spoke of being "in the Father." That, of course, is not a location or place, but a relationship of intimate harmony and unity. At this point, our finite minds give us no frame of reference to understand what Jesus really meant. Jesus then said, "And you in Me." It is like saying, "In the same way that I sustain an intimate, harmonious relationship with the Father, you sustain exactly the same relationship with me for the same reason." Though we certainly do not understand all that this relationship involves, still we understand the depth, beauty and intensity of that relationship at a much deeper level than ever before. It suggests that we are a part of everything Jesus is doing in the world to accomplish the Father's will and purpose.

Jesus was not finished. He also added, "And I in you." In this passage, one must ask, what is the difference between being in Christ and He being in us? First, in both instances there is a deep harmony and unity that is not found elsewhere in the world. When Jesus spoke of being in the Father and the Father in Him, it at least includes being in harmony with the Father's character. This enabled Jesus to say, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father." (John 14:9)

Where Are You ?!

A. Being in Christ – If I am in Christ, then it is understood that I am chosen. It was not my choosing to be there, but His choosing to welcome me there.

B. In John chapter 14, Jesus spoke of being in the Father and the Father in Him.

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. John 14:10

He went on to say that He said the things the Father gave Him to say. He was saying that the things He did were the things the Father bade Him to do. This was His intent when He said, "But the Father abiding in Me does His work." When Christ is in us, He does His work through us in exactly the same way as the Father abiding in Jesus does His work through Him.

How does one comprehend the presence of the Son of God taking up residence in one's life? If you look closely at verse 21, you see the essential elements in Jesus' abiding in a redeemed sinner's life.

Obedience is the evidence, the confirmation of our love for Christ. The self-disclosure of the Father and the Son to us is the evidence of His love for us.

These verses give the secret of that abiding presence as well as giving us a glimpse into the Holy of Holies where the Father and the Son share an intimate, harmonious relationship. In each instance there is a parallel relationship. In verse 20, Jesus described an intimate relationship involving three persons:

- a. Jesus is in the Father
- b. We are in Christ
- c. Christ is in us

As described earlier, the use of the word "in" identifies an intimate relationship rather than a specific location.

It is breath-taking to know that with all our weaknesses and limitations, still we are the objects of our Father's love. Jesus continued His promise indicating that He too will love us. We are the recipients of the love of the Trinity.

Many people feel as Moses felt when he cried out, "Show me Thy glory." Exodus 33:18. One does not discover the depths of our Savior through long and arduous study. He made it clear that He would reveal Himself to that soul whose preoccupation is to obey His commands. We have made knowing Jesus a goal. He has declared it to be a byproduct of obedience. Pondering this causes one to bow in His presence; to kneel in silent awe before His majesty just to think that the Son of God would openly disclose Himself to us.

"And you are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Luke 22:28-30

Think of it! They ate and drank at Jesus' table in His kingdom. Again, it is breath-taking to read these words. Jesus drew a direct comparison. Jesus sat at the right hand of the Father on His throne, giving Him total access to the Father. In exactly the same way, Jesus grants us to eat and drink at His table in His kingdom. This was reserved for those who, according to verse 28, "Stood by Me in My trials." Faithfulness, standing by Jesus in His time of trial, was a vital ingredient in being treated by Jesus in the same way the Father dealt with Him.

Jesus went on to say that this is being done in order that, "You may eat and drink at my table in My kingdom." There is a pair of very special insights in this statement. In that culture, one only eats and drinks and welcomes into his home those with whom he is totally in harmony and peace. It isn't just that Jesus wants them to have lunch with Him. It is rather that this is an ongoing mutual relationship of love, care and mutual participation in the work of God. There is a second picture in this cultural image. Down through the ages, kings have honored their most trusted associates by having them eat every meal at their

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table. David was originally honored by Saul by having a place at Saul's table. David honored his friend Jonathan by having Mephibosheth come to his table.

One stands totally at a loss for words to contemplate these lofty truths. It is a time when human language fails to do its task to express our deepest, most wonderful thoughts.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. John 6:56

Jesus was teaching in the Capernaum synagogue. He had claimed to be "The bread that came down from heaven." The people who were gathered there had known him all His life as "the son of Joseph." This set off a great argument. The disagreement was over His deity. In His attempt to help them understand, Jesus described a very intimate, parallel relationship – "abides in Me and I in him."

"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me. John 6:57

One might wonder if this verse really fits into this particular study at all. Admittedly, it is a difficult passage. It does fit. Look at the verse again. Jesus did not say, "As the living Father sent me so send I you." That is not the parallel that we need to look at. Jesus first posed two things that are different from each other.

a. As the living Father has sent me.

b. He who eats me

We need to clarify these statements. This is the only place where you will find the identifier – "Living Father." If you look closely at this verse again, you will see that these parts of the verse are not the parallels. The word "he" identifies the believer.

There is a parallel in this verse, but it only appears complete when you add the second part to it. The use of the word "as" indicates that a comparison is in progress. A parallel statement is based upon the establishment of the first part of the understanding. In this case, that is "As the Living Father has sent me, and I live because of the Father." This statement conveys both a condition and a result.

a. The condition – the living Father sent Jesus

b. The result – Jesus lived because of the Father.

In the second part of this parallel statement the parts are as follows:

a. The condition – He who eats me

b. The result – He also shall live because of Me

In exactly the same way that Jesus lives because of the Father, we live because of Christ. There are some special understandings uncovered in this verse. Because we know the wonderful feeling this produces in us, we also understand the loving response shared between Jesus and the Father. Again, because we know what Jesus has done for us, we gain a glimpse, if only a small one, of the powerful relationship between the Father and the Son.

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. John 15:9-10

There are two exact parallels in these verses. Both of these accomplish the same thing we have seen in the other passages.

A. "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you." As we gain some impression of what it means to be loved by Jesus, so we also gain an insight into the indescribable love shared between the Father and the Son.

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B. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." In these words we gain a glimpse into the relationship between the Father and the Son to grasp just how intensely and wonderfully special that love is. As you think about that, it is precisely what we also experience when we obey the Son.

There is a certain emotional release that quietly escapes the heart as you read these words. It is like the golden sun quietly penetrating the darkness of the night in the early dawn.

'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 'And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; Revelation 2:25-27

In Revelation 2:18-29, Jesus spoke with the church at Thyatira. He spoke of "what you have." In 2:19 Jesus identified what they have.

"I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first." Revelation 2:19

In 2:25-27, Jesus used three different images to describe the person to whom He made these promises. Jesus said, "What you have, hold fast until I come." It is a description of people under intense pressure who absolutely refuse to abandon or deny their faith. Jesus said, "He who overcomes." This is a different picture; in one sense a reverse of the previous one. Instead of an emphasis on avoiding a rejection of faith, this one highlights being victorious over the forces of evil. Jesus also said, "He who keeps my deeds until the end." Observe that it is as essential to overcome evil as it is to keep Jesus' deeds. There is a stress here on both obedience and total endurance. There are many who begin a walk with God only to abandon Him when the pressures increase. In each of these scenarios, there is an emphasis on endurance, on holding fast and on keeping His deeds until He comes.

In verse 27, there is a parallel. Jesus talked about giving these faithful servants authority to carry out judgment upon those who have been less than faithful. The excitement here is not that they can carry out judgment. It is that in the same way that the Father entrusted the Son with this level of authority, so the Son will entrust the faithful servants with the same authority. Think of it! Knowing ourselves as we do, still the Son chooses to entrust the faithful with the same authority He received from the Father.

IN REFLECTION

When my wife and I finished our training for ministry, we felt called to missionary service. We were to establish a seminary on the Island of Manus, off the coast of Australia. Within a few months of the planned departure, Ruth experienced a heart problem which made it impossible to go to the field. People pressed us, "What are you going to do?" We didn't know! We prayed, but nothing was clear; the questions remained. I taught and preached, but for 32 years the questions remained. Finally, in 1989, my doctor urged me to retire early and move to a dry climate. We moved to Colorado. Now my health limited our service.

One day I sat in my little study praying, "God what do you want us to do?" I'll do whatever you want, just show me!" Within a week I was urged to contact a professor at Denver Seminary. The missions professor invited me to teach a three-week intensive course in the Gospel of Mark at a seminary in Donetsk, Ukraine. For ten years, I went annually to Donetsk. Other invitations came and for five years I taught courses in six different countries before being invited to become the interim director of the seminary in Haiti, where I served for ten years. I finally had the opportunity to serve as a missionary.

With all my failures, still He chose to invite me to be "in Him," and chooses to allow His work to be done through our lives. It is more than one can express to think that Christ's relationship with the Father is His intentional pattern for His relationship with us.

Just the thought of spending eternity in the presence of Jesus and the Father makes heaven an awe-inspiring anticipation. Just as breath-taking, however, is the thought that every moment of every day, we are

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privileged to be "in the Father" and "in the Son" and to know that they are in us. This is an intimate relationship that defies human description.

THE IMAGES GOD USES TO TEACH

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle was a multi-purpose design. Its primary purpose was as a place of worship. The initial definition of worship, however, had to do with bringing forgiveness of sins. As a part of this purpose, there was the ministry of intercession which the priest provided on behalf of the people. There were also medical offices the priests provided on behalf of the people (diagnoses of leprosy for Miriam, etc.) Though unannounced at the time of design, the tabernacle was also to serve as the focal point where God and His people shared their presence and fellowship.

And I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. And I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar, I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to me. And I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God. Exodus 29:43-46

In the midst of God's detailed instructions about the tabernacle, its form and use, you have these words. Though designed to bring forgiveness to God's people, still God gave instruction that this is the place where he would meet with His people Israel.

Observe that following the instructions for consecration of the tabernacle, God said, "I will dwell among the sons of Israel." It was a symbol of their peaceful relationship with God. One only dwells among people with whom there is total agreement and harmony.

God said he would be Israel's God. This is a reference to the covenant. The wording of the covenant was clear to all, "I will be their God and they shall be My people."

Twice in verse 46, God said, "I am the Lord their God." It was their way of identifying the character of God. The words "Lord" and "God" are the two most common names for the God of Israel in the Old Testament. Though we tend to use the names "Lord" and "God" interchangeably, the Hebrew people did not. The Hebrew word translated "Lord" is "Yahweh." It portrays God as eternal and was used in situations where the justice of God was described. The Hebrew word translated "God" is "Elohim." It identifies God as omnipotent and was used in situations where the mercy of God was being described. The mention of bringing the people out of Egypt is a reference to the faithfulness of God. God promised Abraham he would bring his people out of the land and He did. The text identified God's purpose in bringing this huge body of people out of Egypt. God identified the fact that He brought Israel out of Egypt in order to dwell among them. This is the seeking nature of God busily being demonstrated for the believers.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34, 35

Here again, you have a heightened expression of an image of God used to guide His people. The author speaks of the cloud covering the tabernacle. God's presence completely covered the tabernacle. Moses was unable to enter the building. God's glory filled the tabernacle. God used the tabernacle as a background against which He could reveal His glory. Observe that he concluded both verses with the same words, "and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

And throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. Exodus 40:36-38

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This is a beautiful picture. God used the tabernacle to bring forgiveness for their past sins, but it was as much a place of encounter between God and His people. It was a means whereby God could guide and protect His people by working in their midst to bring benefit to their lives.

Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and make you walk erect. Leviticus 26:11-13

In a context where God announces His abundant provision for Israel's needs, He announced that He will make His tabernacle (tent) among the people of Israel. This is more than choosing a location to live. Pitching your tent in an area involved being in harmony with those in the area so that they would invite you to become their neighbor and ally.

God continued saying, "He will walk among you."

This is a near-eastern sign of peace. Only an approved friend is free to roam at will through the area where tents are pitched. This is an image God wanted to highlight by the way He spoke to Moses.

Observe that the next words are a reference to the covenant – "I will be your God." God concluded the statement, in verse, 13, by using an illustration. Slaves were chained in such a way that they were incapable of standing fully erect. Only when these bars were removed were they able to stand straight and tall. He spoke of Israel being brought out of Egypt. It was a way to stress the fact that God was with His people and faithfully delivered them out of all their bondage.

At the command of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle many days, the sons of Israel would keep the LORD'S charge and not set out. If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, then according to the LORD they set out. Numbers 9:18-20

In the minds of many, Israel simply wandered throughout the desert year after year. They did wander, to some extent. In fact, there were times when they went in circles. There is a different picture, however, in these verses. God wanted Israel to move only at His command. That is exactly the picture that you see here.

By moving and staying the cloud over the tabernacle, God instructed Israel to stay where they were or to move on. It worked. It was not a systematic experience where they moved during the day and then stayed during the night. As long as the cloud stayed, Israel did not move, no matter how long a time was involved. When the cloud moved, Israel moved with it. It is akin to the delicate guidance of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. The result was that Israel was completely under the control of God.

The only requirement for Israel was simple obedience. God would guide them if they would simply do as He indicated. If you study the context of this passage, Israel did not encounter any of the problems they experienced during their times of rebellion.

But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous. Numbers 12:10

Family infighting is not a modern invention. Aaron and Miriam spoke out against the leadership of Moses. They also made proud claims for themselves. They felt that they were as much a prophetic voice as Moses was. This, of course, was not true. God condemned this bitter attack by Miriam and Aaron. When God withdrew the cloud, the representation of His presence, Miriam was leprous.

She was now an outcast. Craving power among the people, she was now completely isolated from them. Looking for a place of privilege and power, she now faced the brutal termination of life. God had acted in judgment upon her angry outbursts.

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Aaron's situation was also interesting. He was the priest. He was the one anointed to intercede on behalf of the people. Now he was pleading with Moses not to hold this sin against him.

Throughout this part of the story, the tabernacle and cloud were symbols of God's presence among His people. God's presence, however, is always there to accomplish His will, to meet needs throughout the world. The tabernacle is the symbol of God's presence in His world. It is more, however, than an evidence of His mighty presence. It is God in our midst condemning sin and choosing to honor righteousness.

O LORD who may abide in thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; he swears to his own hurt, and does not change; he does not put his money at interest, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken. Psalm 15:1-5

David spoke of those who share God's fellowship. David alluded to eleven qualities that define one's purpose in life. These qualities discover for us what God is doing in His kingdom. They describe the quality of the relationship one shares. It was not only the focal point of their fellowship with God. It was also the place where one's intimate relationship with God expressed itself in righteous actions.

One thing I have asked of the LORD, that I shall seek, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me, He will lift me up on a rock. And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me; and I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD. Psalm 27:4-6

David spent a great deal of time at the tent – that place where God shared fellowship with His people. Above all, David had a burning desire to 'dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of his life. Though David was the king, nevertheless, he could not spend so much as one night in the tabernacle much less the rest of his life. He spoke figuratively at this point. He lived in a beautiful palace and needed no place to stay. He used this image to display his intent. In that culture, only family would be able to stay an indeterminate period of time. Though he was the king, his driving desire was to be a part of God's family. Again, in that culture, only people who were in harmony with you would be invited into your tent. David longed to be in perfect harmony with God.

David explained, "to behold the beauty of the LORD." David could not physically see God's beauty or wonder. The tabernacle tent of meeting was the place where David could reflect on the wonderful qualities of God that are described in scripture; qualities he had observed in his own dealings with God. It was a place where he could inquire about the meaning of God's greatness in his own experience. This reflection resulted in a wonderful time of praise and quiet reverence for God.

He was reminded that the tabernacle was a shelter. It was a place of protection; a hiding from his enemies. It was a fortress where God protected him from all harm.

In these brief verses, David has described the beautiful, intimate relationship he shared with God in the confines of the tabernacle, the place of his intimate fellowship with God. Certainly, several of his Psalms found their inspiration in just such a time and place.

From the end of the earth I call to Thee, when my heart is faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a refuge for me, a tower of strength against the enemy. Let me dwell in Thy tent forever, let me take refuge in the shelter of Thy wings. Psalm 61:2-4

Life was filled with both trauma and victory for David. When life was threatening and tenuous, he called upon God. He sought a stronghold greater than his weakness. He saw a refuge in his intimate relationship with God. God was with him like a tower of strength. The tower was a substantial defense against attack

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and defeat. This intimate relationship with God gave him confidence as well as protection against his enemies. David sought a dwelling place in comforting dependence upon this harmonious relationship with God.

David chose another image to express his idea. In the way a helpless chick is profoundly safe under the wings of a mother hen, so David felt secure in God's intimate presence.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34

As you come to the conclusion of the book of Exodus, the climax is not their escape from gruesome bondage in Egypt. Rather, the tabernacle was erected, the priests were anointed and they washed in anticipation of the divine encounter. Exodus climaxes when the cloud, the visible expression of God's glorious presence comes to cover and fill the tabernacle. The glory of the LORD filled every fiber of the structure. In the visible presence of the invisible God, there was an intense, intimate relationship in which Moses and Israel caught a glimpse of His majesty; a moment of awe where the indescribable took on expression that a limited, finite human being could grasp, at least a little.

For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. Exodus 40:38

This is the closing verse of Exodus. There is a visible cloud on the tabernacle all day, every day. At night there was fire in that cloud. All Israel had visible evidence, moment by moment that God was in their midst guiding, protecting, enabling them as their need required. This was not just as they started out, but throughout all their journey. This intimate relationship was their source of strength, confidence and comfort throughout the perils of their desert journey.

Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by their defiling my tabernacle that is among them. Leviticus 15:31

Leaving Egypt, Israel needed a completely new orientation on how to live a meaningful life before God. The instructions were precise and detailed. In this passage, God dealt with a woman's menstrual time in terms of uncleanness. The concern was that this situation rendered a woman unclean and everyone around her became unclean as well. In this verse, the ultimate concern was quite obvious, "Lest they die in their uncleanness by their defiling my tabernacle that is among them."

A primary concern, in terms of the tabernacle, was that it never be defiled. The purity of the tabernacle was more important than life itself. The message here is obvious. A basic consideration in the intimate relationship between God and mankind is our purity in His presence. It is a loving, comforting, protecting encounter, but purity must permeate it all. In one reference after another, the scriptures speak of "My tabernacle that is among them." That is how God envisioned this relationship.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.'" Revelation 21:3

In the midst of the announcement of the new heaven, earth and Jerusalem, you find these words, "the tabernacle of God is among men." This is a specific, divine choice. Kings tend to place distance between themselves and their subjects. It would seem to enhance the impression of their power and greatness. God, however, seeks our level, our presence. His greatness never needs to be established. It is.

John said, "He shall dwell among them." There is no desire for distance. On the contrary, God has a burning desire for interaction with His people. It should be noted that this is a divine initiation. He desires this relationship and actively pursues it.

John continued, "They shall be His people." This statement speaks, in general, of belonging. More pointedly, it identifies those involved as family. The near-eastern idea of family suggests strong

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responsibility. Members are required to help and defend each other. They are to make the necessary arrangements if another member of the family experiences financial distress. Mutual defense in time of danger is required of family. Mutual sharing of assets is involved when the leader dies. They were also required to live in such a way as to bring honor and respect to the head of the family. They are to be like him.

Again, John continued, "God Himself shall be among them." This is a beautiful way to describe the peace, harmony and unity that pervades the intimate relationship they shared with God.

IN REFLECTION

The picture of the tabernacle, especially in the exodus experience, is a vivid image of God's presence. The emphasis is always that He is in the midst of His people. The New Testament images are much more intense. They portray the Father and the Son abiding within these people rather than just in their midst. In this image of God's presence, the emphasis is on the fact that despite untoward circumstances, God's presence never fails. A second emphasis stresses the fact that this constant presence always works for the good of all His people.

THE MEANING OF "IN"

The idea of being "in Christ" is almost exclusively Pauline, but it does not originate with him. In John 14 and 15, Jesus spoke of being "in us" and we "in Him." This is the source of Paul's concept of being "in Christ."

When we talk about being "in Christ," we must attempt to describe what we mean even if we are unable to define it. We are physical, but the Father, Son and Spirit are spirit, not flesh. We are talking about flesh taking up residence in spirit and spirit taking up residence in human flesh. When we talk about God taking up residence IN us, we are again struggling with the limitations of human language to put into words an intimate relationship that is beautiful beyond human description. How does this happen? This is the dilemma we face when talking about being "in Christ." Our questions focus around what we mean when we use the word "in." The Greek word translated "in" is "en". The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, indicates that the basic meaning of the word focuses on a certain space or place. It is what one has in mind when speaking of being "in a house." There is no problem of speaking of the Father being "in us" thinking of a particular location. A spirit can take up residence in a human body. You face a different situation when speaking of our being "in Christ." We cannot explain how a physical, human body can take up residence "in Christ," speaking of a specific location.

The word "in" is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament. Though the word very often identifies a specific location, it does not, however, identify a mystical location.

It is, frankly, easier to grasp the idea of Christ being in us – spirit in flesh – than it is to grasp the idea of our being "in Christ," flesh in a spirit. Jesus was the one who spoke these words, in John 14 and 15. He was in physical form when He said it. Still He could speak of His being in us and our being in Him as well as the Father (a spirit) being in us.

This word "in" was sometimes used to describe instrumentality or influence. In this scenario, it would mean if I am "in Christ," I am under the instrumentality or influence of Jesus. He is the means whereby certain things take place in the lives of believers. If you look at the passages that describe believers as being "in Christ," in each instance it describes a particular benefit or responsibility that comes to us because we are "in Him." On the other hand, if you look at the passages that speak of Christ being "in us," these also describe a situation in which a variety of benefits, blessings and responsibilities accrue in our lives because of His presence. The difference between our being "in Christ," and His being "in us," has to do with the conditions required in each instance. A pure and holy life is necessary in both instances. The emphasis, however, is different. If we would be "in Christ," the emphasis is mostly on the moral purity of our lives being prepared to be in the presence of God who is absolutely holy. Conversely, If God would be "in us," the emphasis is on our preparedness to be in harmony with what He is doing and the ministry He would share with us.

In the same way that Adam, in his nature, is resident in every person on the face of the earth, so Christ is resident in every believer who has been transformed by His sacrifice on our behalf. This is a description of a relationship rather than a location.

When one is "in Christ," they are participant in all that He is and all He experiences. Being "in Christ," the believer will suffer, but that suffering will be a participation in the sufferings of Jesus and not our own. Christ is living His life in us.

Throughout this study, we will be constantly faced with an attempt to describe in human terms an intimate relationship with God that strains human language to the breaking point. How does one put this marvelous, intimate relationship into words that the humblest of people can understand?!

IN CHRIST

Being "in Christ" is a many-faceted, intimate relationship the believer is privileged to share with Christ. We are "in Him," and He is "in us."

BEING IN CHRIST IS AN ARENA OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

The word translated "forgiving" is "echarisato" which means to grant as a favor; to give pardon in a legal sense. One of the most important things that happens in this intimate relationship is that we are forgiven; we are graciously pardoned in Christ.

Observe that in this intimate, forgiven relationship, Paul also mentions the way we as believers relate to each other. "In Christ," our mutual relationships are ones of kindness. This is the idea of being pleasant and obliging to one another. Another quality of our intimate relationship "in Christ" is that we are tender hearted. The word so translated is "eusplagchnoi" which means to be tender hearted. It is an intense expression of compassion for each other. The next quality we share in this intimate relationship is forgiving one another. The word translated "forgiving" is "charidzomenoi" which as previously indicated, means to graciously pardon. These are character expressions that are unlike the way people tend to treat each other in our culture. This is one part of the expression of what it is like "in Christ." Being "In Christ" presents us with spiritual growth opportunities unlike anything we otherwise share.

being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Romans 3:24

Being "in Christ" is more than an official relationship. It is an intimate sharing of life with Christ. Those in this intimate relationship have been "redeemed." This word literally means "to buy back." It is a legal term. If a person got into financial difficulty, he would either be imprisoned or become a slave to his debtor. The oldest brother of the prisoner would be required to pay the debt of his brother so that he could be released. Jesus Christ, our older brother, paid the ransom for all those who would repent and place their trust in Him. As forgiven sinners, we enter into this intimate relationship. As we share our life with Christ, He becomes a mutual participant in everything we are and do. In that relationship, Paul points out that we are "justified," declared righteous, put right with God as a gift we could never earn.

Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11

Being "in Christ" involves living a completely transformed life. The word translated "reckon" is "logidzesthe" which means "consider," or "take into account." The text might better read, "be always considering yourselves to be dead to sin..." The truth be told, we previously enjoyed what the Bible calls the "pleasures of sin." That has drastically changed. We are still challenged by temptation, but the things we once loved, we now hate. Paul is stressing the fact that we are unable to die to sin or become alive unto God by our own efforts. It has occurred because we are "in Christ."

Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. II Timothy 3:12

Paul was dealing with an issue Timothy could not understand – why was he suffering persecution when he was being obedient to God? In the process of his explanation, Paul used the words of this verse. He spoke of "live godly in Christ." The truth is that unless we are "in Christ" there is no hope that we could live a godly life. Godliness is a byproduct of our intimate relationship "in Christ."

But after certain days, Felix came with Drusilla, his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ Jesus. Acts 2:24

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Though Paul was guilty of no crimes, still he was taken into custody and defended himself before the different authorities. One of these was Felix. Luke tells us that Felix sent for Paul to speak in his own defense concerning "faith in Christ." The word translated "faith" was used in at least two ways in the New Testament. It was used to describe the things one believes. Again, it was also used to describe one's confidence in God. Repeatedly, Paul used the term to describe both of these at the same time. Speaking of it in this way, Luke reminds us that this "faith" is a byproduct of the intimate relationship "in Christ."

having a good conscience; that, wherein ye are spoken against, they may be put to shame who revile your good manner of life in Christ. I Peter 3:16

Peter wrote to a group of believers undergoing severe persecution. If you read this verse carefully, you will observe that Peter mentions several conditions that are an outgrowth of their new life in Christ. First, Peter mentions that they have a "good conscience." The Greek text is a bit more explicit. It reads, "But with gentleness and fear, having a good conscience." This statement includes three byproducts of our intimate relationship "in Christ."

First, he mentioned "gentleness." The word so translated is "prautetos" which describes the strength which makes allowance for the weakness of another. Though this quality is not natural, it is produced as we share the intimate relationship "In Christ."

The second quality Peter mentioned is "phobou" which means to stand in awe of greatness. This reverence is not natural, but grows out of the intimate relationship we share being "in Christ."

The next quality he mentioned was "a good conscience." The word translated "conscience" is difficult to define. I like to think of "conscience" as that moral awareness that enables one to make sound moral judgments. It was Peter's way of saying that as a result of being "in Christ" and Christ residing in him, he was able to live in such a way that his conduct reflected moral values that did not create guilt as he reflected upon his life. If we try to do this on our own, the result will inevitably be pride. A "good conscience" is produced as we share all of life with Jesus Christ.

The fourth byproduct of sharing all of life "in Christ" is the witness of our way of life. The contrast between our lives and those who are enemies of the gospel is so evident that it creates shame in them, even though we are undergoing devastating persecution.

To be sure, these wonderful qualities are only possible because of "being in Christ." He is intimately involved in every experience of our lives.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

The meaning of the word "peace" has changed over the centuries. We tend to think of peace as the absence of conflict or war. They thought of "peace" in much greater scope. The Jewish greeting, even today is "shalom" which means peace. To the Jew, peace includes the absence of conflict but it also deals with every facet of life – health, economy, family, everything. That is what Paul had in mind. The way he wrote it indicates he is saying this peace comes from God. Paul went on to say that this peace which God supplies becomes the protection for our mind and heart because of our intimate relationship "in Christ."

And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. I Peter 5:10

Again, Peter is dealing with believers undergoing severe persecution. He is pointing out what God is doing through this persecution. Peter begins by reminding them that they are dealing with "the God of all grace." He is saying that everything God does in the midst of their suffering is great favor they could never deserve. The word translated "glory" is "doxan" and describes an opinion or reputation. It is indescribable splendor because of His infinite character and power. He is saying that God in His grace has called us into His indescribable splendor to share His reputation.

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He then describes what the results of this grace will be. He said, "He shall perfect you." The word translated "perfect" is *katartisei* which literally means to restore, to supply what is necessary. Though we have been forgiven, we have not become complete imitators of God. Peter is saying that God will accomplish that "in Christ."

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, to the saints that are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 1:1

Paul addressed a fellowship of believers in Ephesus who struggled to maintain their witness in one of Satan's greatest strongholds. The decadence of the city of Ephesus was too vile to describe in polite company. Still, there was a fellowship of God's people there.

Paul identified these people in two ways: They are "saints." The word so translated is *"hagiois"* which means "holy ones;" people set apart for God's purpose; the quality of a person who could be brought into the presence of God. You find this same reference to the "saints" who reside in Philippi, as recorded in Philippians 1:1.

Paul also described the Ephesian believers as "faithful." This word is *"pistois"* which identifies those who put their trust in Christ; fully confident in Him. These spiritual attributes are to be found among those who are "in Christ." It isn't that they try harder. It is that in this intimate relationship they are enabled to allow God to do such a transforming work in their lives. This is just one facet of what happens as a result of these people living in this very intimate relationship with Christ.

rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Colossians 2:7

In this brief sentence, Colossians 2:6, 7, Paul gives four descriptions of the faith of these believers. He said they were "rooted in Him," (that is Christ.) The word that Paul used was *"erridzomenoi"* which means to cause to take root. Paul used an agricultural image which everyone would understand. When a plant is moved, it struggles to exist for a while. It looks limp and unhealthy. After a short period of time, the roots are able to perform their intended duty and draw moisture and nutrients from the surrounding soil. They are "rooted." Applied to one's Christian life, we are "rooted in Him" when the shock of our transformation is over and we begin to draw the nourishment we need from Him as the plant draws from the soil. Were we not "rooted in Him," there would be no hope of spiritual health and strength.

Paul also said, "(They were) builded up." The word so translated is *"epoikodomoumenoi"*. This is a different image and comes from the construction trade. It describes building up a building on a solid foundation. This is an image he intended to describe their taking the foundation teaching they received from him and his coworkers and building their own life and service upon that solid foundation. This is not possible to any who are not "in Christ."

Paul also mentioned their "being established in their faith." The word translated "established" is *"bebaioumenoi"* which means to make firm, to secure. It is one thing to begin a life of faith. It is quite a different thing to make that life of faith dependably secure against the attack of the evil one. This is one of the results of being "in Christ."

The word translated "overflowing" is *"perisseuontes"* which means great abundance. The Greek form Paul used would render the translation, "always overflowing with gratitude." The great blessing of being "in Christ" makes it impossible to adequately give thanks for all He has made available in our lives.

THE RESULTS OF BEING "IN CHRIST"

so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another. Romans 12:5

This verse is part of Romans 12:3-8 which is an explanation growing out of the great exhortations in 12:1, 2. Paul was talking to people who are "in Christ." He has exhorted them to present themselves as sacrifices that live and to allow their lives to be transformed by the power of God. He then reminds them that they are "one body in Christ," He continued his explanation saying, "we are members one of another." This

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means that "in Christ" there are two sets of relationships: We are all one body and we each have a part to contribute to the life of the body. On a personal level, we are "members one of another." This means that every person in the body of Christ is a vital, contributing part of everything I do every day. This is an awesome realization. It is also quite unusual, because far too often, people who are "in Christ" view each other as separate, divided from each other. That is not what God has in mind for each of us who are "in Christ."

to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, Ephesians 3:6

In every culture, people find some group to look down upon; to be better than. The Jews took great pride in being the "circumcision." They enjoyed a special, unique relationship with God in the covenant. The Greeks did not have this honor. At the same time, the Greeks were the most highly educated people in that part of the world and looked down upon the Jews. Paul sensed this division in the church at Ephesus. Three times in this verse, Paul used compound words – "fellow-heirs," "fellow-members of the body," and fellow-partakers," to indicate that both groups were mutually a part of each other's lives. "In Christ" there is this mutual participation; this unique sense of oneness to be found in no other culture. These people who in the past saw each other as two separate groups, now realize God has blended them together and has made one group "in Christ" out of the two groups. You can see the same message in Galatians 5:6 where Paul said,

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love. Galatians 5:6

In this verse, Paul sets aside their former division in order to point out the fact that "in Christ" faith expressing itself through love becomes the atmosphere in which the two groups unite. This does not happen outside of Christ.

Now he that establisheth us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; II Corinthians 1:21

Particularly with the Corinthian church, Paul found it necessary to defend his apostleship. In his defense, Paul mentioned two things that happened to him "in Christ." Paul said, "he who establishes us..." The word translated "establishes" is "bebaion" which means to strengthen inwardly, to make one unwavering. Paul also said, "and anointed us." The word is "chrisas" which means to appoint or assign to a task. He was saying that the inner strength a believer needs as he grows in grace is brought into his life through this intimate relationship "in Christ." God has an assigned ministry for every child of God. In our intimate relationship "in Christ," we receive the privilege of serving God in that ministry to which He has assigned us and enabled us.

Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. II Corinthians 5:17

In this verse, Paul was struggling with the limitations of human language. He is saying that "in Christ" we become a totally different person than we were before. A student I once taught is an example of this. He would cheat on exams. If there was a problem on campus, you could count on him to be in the middle of it. This young man decided to take faith seriously. He came to me and asked me to be a person to whom he could be spiritually accountable. He came every morning to tell me if his previous day had been victorious or not. He started to talk to other students who were known to be a problem in the school. People came to me and said, "something is different about him. What happened?" He had become a new creature in Christ.

Wherefore, though I have all boldness in Christ to enjoin thee that which is befitting, Philemon 1:8

Paul was dealing with a very delicate issue – slavery. The culture would demand that Philemon punish the run-away slave, Onesimus. In the rest of the community this would mean death for the run-away and the

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slave owners would pressure Philemon to do just that. Paul is boldly instructing Philemon to give Onesimus his freedom to serve with Paul. It takes boldness to stand against one's culture. Boldness does not come in pound packages. It is the product of our intimate relationship "In Christ." It is allowing God to accomplish His will through our lives.

But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savor of his knowledge in every place. II Corinthians 2:14

Again, Paul is groping for words that adequately express what he is trying to say. In this verse, Paul highlights two benefits that come to those who are "in Christ." First, he mentioned "He always leads us in triumph." The word so translated is "thriambeuontai" which means to lead in triumph. Paul has, again, chosen an image everyone would understand. When a king returned in victory from battle, he would lead his victorious army and a procession of his captive enemy in a triumphant procession into the royal city. Paul used unusual emphasis in this statement. First he used the word "always" "pantote". He then used two Greek forms (present tense and participle) which both describe action that never ceases. A more precise translation might be, "He always leads us in triumph and never stops leading us in triumph." Paul is saying as we live our lives "in Christ" He enables us to live victoriously. This the pagan never experiences – just ask the drug addict or alcoholic.

The second benefit is found in Paul's words, "manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." The Jews in the church would understand this statement very well. The sacrifice of thanksgiving was described as a sweet aroma. Paul is saying that "in Christ" we lead victorious lives and these are a sweet aroma; a sacrifice of thanksgiving as the knowledge of God is widespread through the witness of our lives.

and that because of the false brethren privily brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: Galatians 2:4

A favorite tool of the enemy was to insert an enemy of Christ into the congregation pretending to be a follower of Christ. These traitors of the gospel would then cause untold difficulty in the church. Paul is dealing with such a situation in this passage. In the process, Paul mentions one of the marvelous benefits of being "in Christ" – our liberty. The word so translated is "eleutherian" which is the opposite of slavery. It is a way of life which is not dominated by legal restraint. Being "in Christ" we have liberty that no pagan worship experiences.

If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Philippians 2:1, 2

Philippians chapter two gives a lengthy description of what life is like "in Christ." In these two verses, Paul identifies nine results of being "in Christ."

He mentioned "encouragement." The word is "paraklaetos". The word literally means 'to stand beside.' This legal term is the way they identified an attorney. It is also the word by which they identified the Holy Spirit. Paul was saying that in the midst of the serious opposition the faithful will experience that there is a comfort; an encouragement which is ours "in Christ."

Paul mentioned "consolation of love." The word translated "consolation" is "paramuthion". This literally means to speak closely. It describes comforting tenderness that love provides. When the believer is under attack, this is of inestimable value and it is our portion "in Christ."

The word translated "fellowship in the Spirit" is "koinonia". The word means to share in common, to mutually participate. Paul was saying that the Holy Spirit enables those who are "in Christ" to hold life and ministry together in common. This would necessitate their deep sense of unity.

Paul said, "(if there is any) affection." The word is "splanchna" which literally means "intestines" and was used because they believed that this part of the body was the seat of tender emotions and compassion. Paul's

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statement here expresses his message – there is a deep measure of compassion involved in our intimate relationship "in Christ."

The conditional statement, "if there is any compassion" places great emphasis here. The word so translated is "oiktirmoi" which is a word used to describe the mercy of God. We must look to see what is the difference between these two terms. "Splagchna" focuses on the idea of compassion, that inner feeling which motivates one to deal with another's pain. "Oiktirmos," on the other hand, focuses on the mercy which underlies the compassion. The use of both of these words places strong emphasis on the fact that these inner qualities are fostered in the lives of those who through the Spirit are "in Christ."

In verse two, Paul talked about "being of the same mind." The word so translated is 'phronaete" which does not mean think the same things, but rather to have the same attitude. The early church did not all think the same thing about salvation for the Gentiles, but they did all have the same attitude. When James made the announcement in Acts 15, the issue was not mentioned again. This kind of unity is fostered among those who are "in Christ."

Paul also mentioned "maintaining the same love." When believers love one another, it is a unique witness to the world. A non-Christian, first century observer of the early church summarized the life of the church by saying, "behold how they love one another." Paul expected people "in Christ" to have this kind of intimate relationship with each other.

Paul spoke of being "united in spirit." This statement is a translation of the word "sumpsuchoi" which literally means "with soul." It is to be harmonious; to be in full agreement. It is the difference between a car motor that knocks and one that quietly purrs along.

Paul closed the verse with the enjoiner, "intent on one purpose." This is a translation of the words, "the one thinking." The word so translated is "phronountes". This is the second time this root word has appeared in this sentence. Again, it deals with the attitude of those who are "in Christ." It was Paul's way to say to these spiritually weak believers, though we may have different ideas about how we can serve God together, we "in Christ" must be totally committed to accomplish God's will in this fellowship. That is made possible because we are "in Him."

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Philippians 2:3

As Paul continued to describe our intimate relationship "in Christ," he turned to two negative factors. He said, "do nothing from selfishness." The word translated "selfishness" is "eritheian" which really means an attitude of self-seeking or rivalry. This can only take place when all concerned are focused on God's will for our fellowship. This would leave no room for rivalry of any kind. Paul is really saying that our intimate relationship "in Christ" is one in which there is no room for selfish concern. That would be a beautiful picture.

The second negative factor Paul mentioned was, "(no) empty conceit." The word so translated is "kenodoxian" which means vain pride or groundless boasting. We have all seen this at one point or another. When our goal or purpose is singularly to share in accomplishing God's will, then groundless boasting is clearly out of place. How beautiful it must be to watch as God's people become totally absorbed in accomplishing His will and nothing else.

Again, Paul returned to the positive images of what it is like for those who are "in Christ." He said, "But with humility of mind." The word translated "humbleness of mind" is "taipeinophrosunae". This is voluntary submission which is the opposite of arrogance or pride. Each expression in this verse clearly points out that for those who are "in Christ," we must be so preoccupied with participating in what God is doing that there is no time or place for any form of selfish concern.

Do not merely look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:4

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Paul continued to describe what it is like to be "in Christ." Contrary to the thinking of some, Paul describes a lifestyle in which a person is required to look after his own interests, but is equally concerned about the interests of others as if they were his own. This is quite surprising in our "me first society."

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. Who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Philippians 2:5

For those "in Christ," we are commanded to have the same attitude Jesus had. The word translated "attitude" is "phroneite". This is the third time in this paragraph that this root word has been used. Again, it means to think deeply; to be inclined in such a way. Paul continued in verse six where he said,

Who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Philippians 2:6

In Philippians 2:5, Paul admonished these believers to have the same attitude which was so evident in Jesus. In each of the next three verses, 2:6-8, he pointed to the exceptional humility of Jesus. Strong humility is a beautiful quality to see in a believer. Again, this is one of the results of a life lived in an intimate relationship "in Christ." In the Godhead there was a sharing of power, but no groping for power.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

We were all born with a sinful nature and our conduct confirmed that evaluation. The feeling of guilt is a universal experience. Paul exalted to proclaim that for those "in Christ" there is no condemnation; no announced punishment we rightfully deserve. The record is clean as though we had never done wrong. This is the blessed result of being in Christ."

IN REFLECTION

If you review the verses quoted in this chapter, you will find 19 specific forms of spiritual growth that occur in the lives of those who are "in Christ." This is a serious issue in the modern church. People come to faith "in Christ," but they do not mature. As the author of Hebrews points out, the people remain spiritual infants. One of the great emphases in the New Testament is that in this intimate relationship "in Christ," we may grow in His likeness.

Another emphasis in the New Testament is that there are wonderful results of living in Christ. The passages that are included in this section of the chapter highlight 18 specific things that result as we live in His likeness in this intimate relationship. Never before has this truth been so important or more available.

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OUR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ENABLING FOR SERVICE

He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? Matthew 22:43, 44

Believers invariably attempt to serve God relying upon their own wisdom and power. This is a prescription for failure. In his intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, the psalmist David was enabled to write about the coming Messiah in an accuracy of information that only the Holy spirit could inspire him to write. You will find this same information in Mark 12:36

Now after these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. "Acts 19:21

In the midst of a vibrant, fruitful ministry in Southern Europe, Paul sensed the Holy Spirit leading him to return to Jerusalem. The Spirit also made it clear that Paul would eventually make his stand on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ in Rome. It is the teaching of the New Testament that in our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit we are guided to the place and ministry He has chosen for the investment of the gifts He has placed in our lives. Paul could not have known otherwise that in the will of God he had been chosen to witness to his faith in Christ and proclaim the gospel in the most prominent city of the pagan world.

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit testifieth unto me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. Acts 20:22,23

In the intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, we are carefully led in every detail. In this direction of our lives, it isn't that we plan or know every detail of each coming event. It is that we are guided step by step, but only as we experience each step do the details become clear. As Paul ministered in city after city in Asia Minor, he was firmly convinced that he would go to witness in Jerusalem though everyone told him that this would be suicidal. He, however, knew nothing more at this point concerning what God would do through him in this ministry. A little boy of four confidently told his parents that God wanted him to be a minister. Naturally, they did not take this word seriously. He knew not one detail of what would unveil in his life some 20 years later as he trained for the ministry.

In Acts 2:4, Luke tells us that these people were filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enabled them to speak in languages they had not learned, but these were the native languages of all the different visitors in Jerusalem that day. In this intimate relationship, the Holy Spirit, who indwelt their lives, enabled them to witness in a language these visitors could understand fully. In this way, the gospel of Jesus Christ instantly spread across many nations in that part of the world. This is just one of the ways the Holy Spirit worked through the lives of people with whom He shared an intimate relationship.

And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit. John 1:33

This is a marvelous verse. In it you see the Holy Spirit participating in the life and ministry of the Son. You also see the Holy Spirit interacting with a choice servant, John the Baptist, in whom He dwelt. This is the way the Holy Spirit shares this intimate relationship.

OUR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ENABLING FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh? Galatians 3:3

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Paul was dealing with a group of people who had gotten involved in some erroneous teachings and practices. They were not responding well to his efforts to help them return to solid teaching. We mention this verse because it conveys two very important teachings. He said, "having begun in the Spirit." Paul spoke very carefully. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He takes up residence in the lives of these new believers to enable them to eliminate their former pagan ways and practices from their new lives in Christ. This is a miracle to observe.

Paul also said, perhaps sarcastically, "are you now perfected in the flesh?" What he was really saying is, "You began your Christian life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By the same token, you should complete this walk with God in the enabling of the Holy Spirit." We are commanded to be "imitators of God." It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us discern every practice and direction that would keep us from being an exact replica of the character of God. It is like saying everything that would prohibit us from increasingly becoming a participant in the divine nature (I Peter 1:4) must be eliminated from our lives by the Holy Spirit. As we discover the things that inhibit such growth, the Holy Spirit guides and enables us to mature in His likeness. The Spirit enables that spiritual growth in our lives when we have tried in our own strength and failed miserably.

And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. I Corinthians 6:11

Keep in mind the people to whom Paul is writing. The Corinthian church was more spiritually troubled than the recipients of any other New Testament epistle.

Writing to them, in this verse, Paul lists three areas of spiritual growth in which these recipients had been involved. Observe his use of the word "but" before each of these. This addition adds significant emphasis to the statement. These believers were washed (sins forgiven), sanctified (set apart for the service of God), and justified (cleared of all charges of sin in their lives). It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to join forces with Christ to produce completely transformed children of God. As we mentioned in an earlier chapter, the members of the Godhead work together to achieve the Father's will in molding His children in the likeness of His holy character.

For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. I Peter 4:6

Both Peter and Paul mention preaching to the dead. It is their effort to deal with all those who lived before the time of Jesus Christ to have an opportunity to accept Him. In this verse, the author spoke of "living according to God in the spirit." It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable the believers to live his faith according to God. It is to be, do, think and speak just as God would do in His holy life and character. In that intimate relationship of being "in the Spirit," He works in our lives so as to reproduce God's holy ways in our lives. What a wonderful blessing He brings to the way we live.

Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 12:3

In the Corinthian church, there were some who questioned the deity of Jesus. When we share an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, He guides us so that we really grow spiritually. At the same time, He teaches us so that what we understand and say about God is absolutely true.

For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; I Corinthians 12:8, 9

Observe that in these two verses, Paul has identified four spiritual gifts – wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith and gifts of healing. We should note two beautiful truths here. First, note that Paul said, "to one is given." These gifts are not something we practice or learn. They are rather "given." The word so translated

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is "didotai" and means to give or to entrust. The form of the word is present passive. The present tense describes a lifestyle. The passive voice is action the subject receives. One might translate the word "He is being given." The second truth to observe is that along with the naming of each gift Paul carefully added the words "through the Spirit" or "according to the same Spirit," or "in the same Spirit." He was carefully ascribing these gifts to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, Romans 9:1

O What a beautiful truth! When the new Roman convert began his life "in Christ," he discovered that the Scriptures challenged most everything he had been taught in his home. He had to learn to rely on the ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach his conscience how to live "in Christ." For several years, I directed a seminary in the Caribbean. The voodoo culture in that country taught them that it was OK to cheat. There were to be no consequences for wrong doing. When I punished ministerial students caught cheating, they were confused. When caught, they felt I should forgive and there would be no consequences. This was a difficult truth for them to learn. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to instruct the conscience concerning how to conduct ourselves "in Christ."

These are they who make separations, sensual, having not the Spirit. Jude 1:19

Three times in this brief epistle, Jude refers to his readers as "beloved." They are believers for whom Jude has great love. These believers are now being confronted by people whose lifestyle is anything but godly. Jude is addressing the issue in this verse. Jude listed three derogatory character qualities that are concerns. One of these is divisiveness. The second is translated "sensual" or "worldly minded." The word is "psuchikoi" which means worldly or unspiritual. The third is that "they are not having the Spirit." It is not surprising that people who do not have the Holy Spirit abiding in them are prone to be divisive and are worldly minded rather than spiritually minded. Jude is saying that being indwelt by the Holy Spirit leads us away from these evil qualities and points us in the direction of the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22.

OUR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A GUIDE TO ENABLE US TO LIVE EACH DAY "IN CHRIST"

with all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, Ephesians 6:18

Prayer is one of the least understood experiences in the Christian church today. It should not surprise us that it is so seldom practiced. Very few congregations have a regular prayer meeting. If they do have a regular prayer service, a majority of their members do not participate. James has some incisive insights to share about one's prayer life. He wrote,

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war; ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures. James 4:2, 3

Think about your own experiences of prayer. A very painful experience comes into your life. How do you pray? Do you pray that God will take the pain away? Usually! What if God allowed that difficult, painful experience to come into your life in order to help you grow spiritually? Would your praying facilitate the will of God for your life? Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers concerning their ministry of prayer. This important verse gives some excellent instructions concerning prayer. Prayer is a daily experience, not something we do if we think about it or do out of a sense of duty. We are to pray "in the Spirit." It is a joint ministry that we and the Holy Spirit share together all the time. Prayer is an expression of great concern that we and the Spirit share together. When we pray, the Spirit prays with us and guides our concerned petition. As we pray for ourselves and each other, we must learn to listen as the Spirit prompts

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us to perseverance rather than to escape difficult experiences. It is such a wonderful experience to share as the Holy Spirit prays through our deep concern.

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, Jude 1:20

We previously addressed verse 19. In verse 20, Jude addressed his readers as "beloved" for the third time. In verse 19, Jude pointed out what happens when people do not have the Holy Spirit abiding in them. In verse 20, he contrasts that with what occurs when they "pray in the Spirit." When praying in the Spirit, they are being built up in the most holy faith. Like Paul, Jude tends to quietly insert things into the text that we might miss, but those familiar with the language would quickly identify. In the Greek text, the words "being built up" and the word "praying" are both in the present participial form. These two forms both identify ongoing action and describe a strong lifestyle. It is a point of exceptional emphasis. In almost every instance, this is a deliberate effort to tie these two things together. It is a way of saying that our intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit results in living a daily life in harmony with God's presence and will.

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led in the Spirit in the wilderness Luke 4:1

Luke was describing the events following the baptism of Jesus. In this verse, Luke made two statements about the Holy Spirit as He relates to Jesus. First, Jesus, the Son of God, was filled with the Holy Spirit of God. The word translated "filled" is "pleraes" which means "wholly filled" to be "thoroughly endowed." This is a special image intended to convey a spiritual picture. A bucket filled with water has no room for anything else. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and there was no room for any other influence to be effective in His life. We are called to be like Him; so filled with the Holy Spirit that there is no room for any other influence to divert us from what the indwelling Holy Spirit is doing within us.

In the same sentence, Luke mentioned that the Holy Spirit led Jesus "in the wilderness." The Holy Spirit will lead that believer who is totally filled with His presence. It is not a matter of seeking His direction for what the filled believer ought to be doing. It is a matter of allowing the Holy Spirit who intimately fills the believer to lead us in the accomplishment of God's will and purpose for our lives.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, that they might do concerning him after the custom of the law, Luke 2:27

The context describes the event when Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to present Him to the Lord as their first-born son. God had long before promised Simeon that he would not die before he saw the Messiah, the Savior of his people. Granted, it was improbable that in the natural course of events he would meet Mary and Joseph. And even if he did meet them, how would he know that this infant was the messiah who would redeem his people Israel. The answer is that Simeon did not just come to the temple as he did day by day. Simeon came "in the Spirit." The indwelling Holy Spirit carefully led and guided him to the fulfillment of the promise of God. The Holy Spirit carefully leads and guides our lives so that the will of God for our lives is accomplished. As the Holy Spirit fills our lives, He will guide us step by step.

OUR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLES THE BELIEVER TO CARRY OUT HIS FAMILY IDENTITY

in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:22

The apostle Peter reminded his readers to "be holy for I am holy" (I Peter 1:16). Before God carried on a conversation with Moses at the burning bush, Moses had to remove his shoes. – be reminded that he was a servant. This was tough-duty for one who earlier had been destined to be the most powerful king in the world. The priests had to cleanse themselves in preparation to serve God at the altar. These and other examples remind us we do not just rush into God's presence. We come with careful preparation.

IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this verse, Paul counsels with the Ephesian saints that their position was one of being the dwelling place of God. The word translated "builded together" is "sunoikodomeisthe" which means "build up together" rather than separately. This is a metaphor which is a bit different from what he has already described. Paul had previously described an intimate relationship in which an individual believer sustained an intimate relationship with God in which Christ took up residence in a single individual. This is different. In this verse Paul described an intimate relationship in which the believers jointly become the place where God dwells. This is carried out by the Holy Spirit. Look at this again. The Holy Spirit so ministers in the fellowship of believers that in harmony they all together become a place where God dwells in the same way He dwells in a single individual. It involves two intimate relationships. There is an intimate, holy relationship wherein God dwells in the hearts of the believers jointly. At the same time, there is an intimate relationship within and between the saints that in harmony they jointly become the residence of God in all His holiness and love.

John makes it clear that "If I say that I love God and hate my brother, I am a liar." (I John 4:20). The intimate relationship between the persons in the body and God is only as real as the love relationship between the members of the body. This is God's expectation of our intimate relationship with Him and it is accomplished through our being "in the Spirit."

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father; for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. Luke 10:21

Prior to this verse, Jesus was rejoicing with the 72 as they reported their victorious efforts in preaching the gospel. In verse 21, Jesus begins the paragraph in prayer. In this verse, Luke tells us that "He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit..." Though Jesus was the only member of the Trinity to take upon Himself human flesh and limitations, still He did not act unilaterally. In this statement, Jesus presents a picture of His working jointly with the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Father's purposed and they rejoiced together as they had mutually been involved in this ministry. This is a way of saying that the Holy Spirit was equally involved in everything Jesus did and shared the joy with Him. The relationships within the Trinity serve as a model for the way we as believers relate to each other and work jointly to accomplish the Father's will in our ministry.

But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Romans 8:9

In Romans chapter eight, Paul contrasts the intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit as over against the terribly frustrating, lonely experiences alluded to in chapter seven. Paul presented us with three pieces of information concerning the indwelling Holy Spirit.

- A. Those whose sins are forgiven can live life in the Spirit. By this he meant that we can share an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit in which He is partner and participant in everything I do, think and say as I pursue God's direction for my life and service.
- B. The Holy Spirit will take up residence in the life of the believer, if invited. Imagine, it would never again be appropriate to say that I am all alone and lonely. Think of it! He, being in me, shares every thought, word and action of my life. It is no longer my actions, but the Spirit's actions in my experience.
- C. The Holy Spirit resides in every believer. Some would look at this and say that one can't be a Christian unless the Holy Spirit dwells in your life. It is more meaningful to view this from the other side – Because I am a forgiven sinner, God through His Holy Spirit takes up residence in me, fashioning and directing every event and experience I encounter. Whatever I do, He is the silent partner.

who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:8

Where Are You ?!

There are some believers who deal with spiritual growth like going to a cafeteria for lunch. "I'd like one of these and one of those." The Biblical picture of spiritual growth is a byproduct of our increasing obedience to Christ rather than a goal to be achieved.

There are two facets of our need to love as God loves. In II Peter 1:5-7, the apostle gives a detailed picture of the process of spiritual growth. Love is the culmination of that process. Here in Colossians, Paul provides a picture of the atmosphere in which this spiritual growth takes place. Living in an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, all of our spiritual qualities of character are increased and it will ultimately express itself in love for one another. It is not surprising that Jesus said,

And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets. Matthew 22:37-40

It is not uncommon to hear believers use "the kingdom of God" as an alternative way to refer to the eternity we will share with the Lord. It is that, but it is much more. There is a strong "here and now" element in the kingdom of God.

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

Read this verse again. The way Paul has written this is helpful. First, he told us what the kingdom was not. Then he told us what it is. His wording is very deliberate. "The kingdom of God... is righteousness in the Spirit, peace in the Spirit and joy in the Spirit." Repeatedly in the Scriptures, it speaks of godly characteristics in proximity with being "in the Spirit." This is the intimate atmosphere in which godly qualities develop.

which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; Ephesians 3:5

Throughout the Old Testament, there are prophetic messages concerning the ultimate, divine design, but it was never as clearly stated as it is in the New Testament. The words translated "in the Spirit" are "en – pneumatī". The word "en" is usually translated "in." In other situations, as it is here, the word is used to describe means or instrumentality. In this verse, it clarifies that the Holy Spirit was the means by which God revealed His design to redeem mankind from their chosen lifestyle of evil and destruction. In that intimate relationship with the Spirit, God reveals His grand design for us and for the world one step at a time. We are so limited: God is all knowing. It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to reveal this design to our very finite minds.

IN REFLECTION

The call to Christian service is a divine requirement for every believer. It is not casual, but very specific. The Spirit directs where one should serve and gives gifts essential to our service.

The Holy Spirit guides and enables our spiritual growth. It involves teaching us the ways of God and transforming our lives into a holy example when once it was essentially sinful.

In the Spirit, we are guided in our daily walk. The Spirit guides our life of prayer and directs our conformity to the example of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit guides as we become part of the family of God. He leads us to reflect the presence and holy character of our God.

ABIDING IN CHRIST

The word "abide" brings to mind an image of a place, a location. It is thought of as staying in a certain place. Abiding is what one does when he pitches his tent. It stood for much more than this. The word was used to describe the unchanging quality of God. It described that quality of God as one who remains true to an agreement or covenant. It described that divine quality of changelessness while others appear to be transitory. It also described that unique enduring quality we find in God. The Old Testament authors, particularly David, used the word "abide" to describe the contrast between earthly riches that perish and the dominion of God that endures and keeps on enduring. It is the word that described the experience when the Shekinah glory took up residence in the midst of the people of Israel.

The New Testament word had the same literal meaning. It stressed the idea of dwelling permanently. It is to stay in one place, to pitch your tent. It may surprise some to realize that it also describes a relationship. In fact, this is the most common way that Paul used the term. He used the term to describe the changelessness of God. In I Peter 1:23, 25, the apostle used the word "abide" to express the idea that God's word remains while that which is human and corruptible changes and ceases to be. John 12:34 uses the term to describe the eternal character of Jesus even though He had to die a human death. Sixty-six of the 112 times the word "abide" or "abiding" appear in the New Testament are in the writings of John.

Matthew 12:43 speaks of an unclean spirit "abiding" in a man. In this instance, however, it represents more than just a location. It represents the control of this person's life by this evil spirit.

In John 8:35, Jesus described the difference between a son and a slave in the home. The slave "abiding" in the home had no legal status or necessary intimate relationship. Good or bad, the son was always the son in that home. It involved intimate relationships as well as privileges and responsibilities. Above most of the others, this passage reflects some of the deeper meanings of abiding.

And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. John 5:38

On the Sabbath, Jesus had healed a man at the pool of Bethesda. The religious leaders accosted the man for carrying his mat on the Sabbath as Jesus instructed him. When he told them Jesus had healed him, they accosted Jesus as well. In this verse, Jesus responded to their accusation. Imagine, Jesus spoke to the religious leaders and said that they did not have God "abiding" in them. By this He was not speaking of a location, but a relationship. It was a way of saying that they were not in harmony or sympathy with what the Scriptures taught. Jesus then explained why this was true. "For you do not believe Him whom He sent." The one whom the Father had sent was Jesus. "Abiding" was conditioned on whether they "believe Him whom He (the Father) sent." This clearly speaks of a relationship rather than a location. Abiding required more than just a decision to stay. It required a strong faith that Jesus is not only God's Son, but also our Savior. The entire intimate relationship rests upon one's faith that Jesus is their savior.

"He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. John 6:56

The Jews complained about Jesus' claim to be the "bread that came down from heaven." This verse is part of Jesus answer to their angry attack. Later Jesus would repeat this teaching in connection with what we call "communion." Jesus has described a mutual, intimate relationship existing between Him and those who received the bread and wine. He said these recipients would abide in Him and He would abide in them. This is not two ways of saying the same thing for purposes of emphasis. It rather describes two specific, intimate relationships.

When we speak of these people abiding in Jesus, it identifies a definite relationship. If we are to abide in Him, then we must become increasingly what He is. It is a deep need to be holy because He is holy. It requires an increasing quality of character so that when people look at our lives they will understand what He is like, just as when people looked at Jesus, they understood what the Father was like. Jesus said,

if you have seen me, you have seen the Father." John 14:9

Where Are You ?!

On the other hand, if Jesus abides in us, this purity of life is essential, but it is more than that. It describes a commitment to the will of God being accomplished and living out in us as it was in Jesus. It also requires being in harmony with the divine agenda in order to invest ourselves as He invested His complete self in God's plan of redemption.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves. John 14:10-11

Jesus attempted to calm his fearful disciples after telling them that He was going to die. He described the intimate relationship He shared with the Father. He said, "I am in the Father." He did not say He was the Father. He was saying that there is a harmonious, intimate relationship between Him and the Father. This required a commonness of character and purpose.

Jesus also said, "the Father is in Me." This relationship requires that the Father be compatible with the ministry and teachings of Jesus. It indicates that the Father is in harmony with the character of Jesus. It also indicates a harmonious working arrangement between the two.

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. John 14:16-17

Jesus identified their relationship with the Holy Spirit in nearly the same way He described His own relationship with the believer. Observe that Jesus described their relationship in two ways:

- a. **"He abides with you."** The form of the word "abides" is present indicative active. This describes action that takes place and never ceases. It describes a lifestyle, rather than a single action.
- b. **"He will be in you"** This form describes a mutual participation in life between the believer and the Holy Spirit. There is a oneness, a harmony binding the two together. (middle voice – himself emphasizes the action of the subject).

In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. John 14:20

Jesus spoke carefully when He said these words. Again, being "in the Father" describes a relationship rather than a location. It was a way to describe the working relationship that existed between Jesus and the Father. When Jesus spoke, he was the Father's voice speaking to His people. When Jesus healed, the Father was carrying out His will through the actions of the Son. It was, so to speak, that the Father was the vine and Jesus was the branch through whom the nature and character of the father flowed to produce fruit in the Father's likeness.

Jesus continued, "and you in me." The use of the word "and" "kai" indicates that the passage which follows is of equal importance with that which preceded. Jesus being in His Father and our being in Him are equal, common parts of the idea He was presenting. If Jesus being in the Father describes the working relationship in which the Father is carrying out His will through the Lord Jesus, then our being in Christ describes the intimate, parallel way in which He speaks through our words and accomplishes His perfect will through our actions.

Jesus also said, "and I in you." The word "and" does not appear in the Greek text, but it is properly understood. When Jesus spoke of being in the Father, it identifies a level of total surrender; total availability for the Father to accomplish His will and mission through the Son with no reservations. It must be equally so when He is in us. Our lives must be the vehicle, the conduit through which His words are verbalized and through whom His actions become visible.

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Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. John 15:4

Again, Jesus used his favorite teaching tool. He drew a parallel between something the disciples knew very well and something they did not understand at all. He compared the relationship between a grapevine and a branch with his relationship with His disciples. In this verse, He drew a scenario of mutual dependence. The vine does not produce grapes. On the other hand, the branch has no life of its own. It depends upon the vine for its life. The branch has no identity of its own, but depends upon the vine for its identity. The branch simply serves as a conduit bringing the vine's identity and life to the site where fruit is to be produced.

Jesus applied this picture to His disciples. Their true identity is inextricably linked to Jesus. He is the only source of life they have. The branch is useless unless it is invested into the vine. The disciples have no real purpose unless they take up residence in Christ and allow Him to accomplish His purposes through them. Their usefulness in the kingdom is totally dependent upon their abiding in Christ.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Repeatedly, in Jesus' parallel about the vine and the branches, He talked about fruit. In this instance, "fruit" is used to describe an increasing Christlikeness. It is what Peter referred to as "participating in the divine nature" or what Paul had in mind when he instructed the Ephesians, "be imitators of God." This intimate relationship with Christ enables the believer to bear much fruit, to be increasingly like his Lord. Apart from the vine, the branch produces no fruit. Apart from our intimate relationship with Christ, we cannot become increasingly Christlike, we cannot reproduce ourselves in the lives of new believers. Like the branch, we are simply a conduit for the life and nature of God to be conveyed to others.

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. John 15:6

Jesus, for purposes of emphasis, presents the negative side of the previous statement. This too is a conditional statement. (IF...THEN) Some people attempt to be very literal with this entire presentation. We must keep in mind that it is not written in literal form. Jesus is not a literal grape vine and we are not literal grape branches. Jesus was saying, however, that IF there is no intimate relationship with Christ, THEN we have a serious problem. Jesus used five images from the vineyard to describe the extent of the problem.

- a. "They are thrown away" – This is a picture of uselessness. It is a serious failure to achieve one's goal and purpose in life.
- b. "They dry up" – This is a picture of death. It also is quite realistic. If you cut a branch from a grape vine, it almost immediately begins to shrivel up. It is a picture of failed usefulness.
- c. "They gather them" – The dead branch is not only removed from the vine, but from the vineyard as well. It is no longer possible for this branch to serve its purpose of producing fruit.
- d. "They are cast into the fire" – Now this dead vine has been relegated to a purpose other than that for which it was intended. It is not surprising that this newer purpose is a lesser one.
- e. "They are burned" – This is terminal. As a branch it would receive care, year by year, and continue to exist and be useful. This, however, is total destruction. It will be burned and there is no further usefulness.

What is Jesus saying? At the least, Jesus was saying that those who do not abide just do not fulfill the Father's plans for their lives and this is a terrible waste. To fail to abide in Christ is a tragic error.

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If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. John 15:7

This, again, is a conditional statement. The conditional part of this statement has two components:

- a. "IF you abide in Me" – This is the intimate relationship we can have in Christ. It identifies a singleness of character and purpose. It also suggests that it is possible for me not to abide in Him.
- b. And (IF) my words abide in you" – He has changed the description to some extent. Previously, it was worded, "If you abide in Me and I in you." Here He said, "if my words abide in you." He has described a very close relationship between the believer and the teachings of Jesus. It is to be in total harmony with Jesus' teachings and commands.

The promise part of this conditional statement is a bit startling. He said, "Ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you." This is, to some extent, a blank check. There are no limits to what we may request and confidently receive. It gives us additional insight into this intimate relationship we may have with God in Christ. It necessitates a careful harmony between God's word and our lives. It also suggests that all His resources are as available to us as they are to Him. There is a haunting question lurking around this verse. Is this a literal promise? If I asked for a million dollars for spending money, does this mean that I will receive it? It seems doubtful. This would not be because he couldn't do it, but rather because it would be contrary to His nature. One might want to think of it in these terms. We are talking about an intimate relationship between God and His people. That being said, our purposes and goals would need to be in keeping with His. It might be appropriate to express this statement these terms, "Ask whatever you will that is in keeping with His will and purpose and it shall be done for you."

If I abide in Him and ask for a million dollars spending money, it probably would be contrary to His will and would not be granted. If, however, I asked for a million-dollar support for a high priority mission project that was badly in need of funds, I believe the divine response would have been just the opposite. My wife's father, Rev. Heinrich Zimmermann, was a faith missionary. In his entire life, he never received a guaranteed salary. Upon coming to the United States, he decided that he should start a mission home for the Liebenzell Mission. He had no American funds whatsoever. He set about to find a suitable farm on which to set up the home. When the location was found, the price was agreed upon and he promised to return in 30 days to pay cash for the property. He told no one of this need. He simply prayed. In 30 days, he returned as promised and paid cash for the property. God had provided every cent without anyone being asked to give.

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. John 15:9

Here as in many other places, Jesus used His relationship with the Father as a yardstick against which the disciples could measure their relationship with Christ. Jesus commanded them to abide, to share an intimate relationship in His love. He has described the atmosphere in which this relationship thrives. He has also described a marvelous gift. He is saying that for those who abide, He invites us to share the indescribable relationship He sustains with the Father. It means that our character will be in perfect harmony with the qualities of His character. The motives of our life and service will be in total harmony with what He is doing in the world.

He has also described a marvelous gift. He was saying that for those who abide, He invites us to share the indescribable relationship He sustains with the Father. The motives of our lives and service will be in total harmony with what He is doing in the world.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. John 15:10

Again, Jesus used the picture of His intimate relationship with the Father as a means to describe His relationship with the disciples and others who followed Him. Jesus pointed to His intimate relationship

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with the Father. This is an indication that such a relationship is possible. Our intimate relationship with Christ is built upon a foundation of obedience to the commands of Jesus. His use of the words "just as" indicates that He will make a very strong comparison. In this comparison, Jesus has given us a glimpse into His relationship with the Father. If we study how Jesus loves us, we will see what that holy relationship between Jesus and the Father was like. How does the Father love Jesus? The Father entrusted all of creation into His care. The Father has placed everything under the control of Jesus. All power shall be brought under the control of our Lord. The epistle to the Hebrews uses the image of a footstool to indicate just how totally Jesus is in control of all things. The Father has placed Jesus at His right hand. This is the place of privilege and power. From that position, Jesus intercedes on our behalf.

The instruction is that the disciples should abide in His love. In the same way that the Father super generously placed everything under the control of Jesus, in that way, Jesus has blessed us and given us places of authority in His kingdom.

And those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. Romans 8:8-9

One of the byproducts of the Holy Spirit's indwelling in our lives is that we can and will please God. This is and should be a major preoccupation of those who share this intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. One of the characteristics of this intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit is that it opens up a completely different arena of life (in the Spirit) for those in whom the Spirit dwells.

Paul concludes verse nine with these words, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him." Dwelling in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit dwelling in us is the normal relationship for the redeemed. It is God's intention for those who have been forgiven. Sadly, there are some who are probably unaware of this divine intent.

It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that provides evidence that we, indeed, belong to God. Many Christians have no idea of what it means for the Holy Spirit to dwell within them. Because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, His presence surrounds us and ministers through us to meet the needs of those who love Him.

And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. Romans 8:10

If Christ abides in our life, we must keep in mind that this does not remove the sinful nature. We are still human. The consequences of the Fall – death and separation from God - are very much a part of our being. Again, if Christ abides in us, there is an ongoing, increasing life of righteousness that will one day destroy the consequences of the Fall.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. Romans 8:11

In verse 10, Paul spoke of Christ indwelling our lives. However, in verse 11, Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit indwelling our lives. In the same way that God through the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, He will also give us life beyond death. Eternal life is a product of this intimate relationship we share with the Trinity.

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man Ephesians 3:16

In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul described some of the essentials for Christ to abide in the believer. In the midst of the struggles of being a Christian in a pagan society, Paul told them that God, "would grant them to be strengthened in the inner man." This would be accomplished through the Holy Spirit working in us. Paul said, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory." This is a way to express the vastness

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of the supply of God's blessing that will be bestowed upon us through the Holy Spirit. In the intimate relationship we sustain with God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered with strength to face every obstacle. There is no way that we can, on our own, totally resist temptation. In this verse Paul tells us that as the Holy Spirit abides in us, just as Jesus resisted temptation, so we can be enabled to do so as well.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, Ephesians 3:17

In every aspect of the Christian life, faith is the foundation of this abiding relationship. When Paul said, "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts," This is usually taken to mean that the person is a Christian. It is much more than that. It was a graphic description of an intimate relationship, rather than a location. The heart was considered the seat of one's deepest emotions and feelings. He was simply saying that Christ abides in us at the point of our deepest, most intense feelings. Words failed the apostle's attempt to describe the depth of this intimate relationship.

Paul also spoke of "being rooted and grounded in love." Love, verified by our obedience, is one of the key foundations of this intimate relationship in which Christ abides in our hearts. This love is not casual. It is, rather, the strong undergirding of our intimate relationship shared with Christ.

May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:18, 19

These two verses give us some important pieces of information about this intimate relationship with Christ. This is not an exercise in measurement. Paul was struggling to express the depth of his understanding within the limitations of human language. How does one completely express the vastness of this indescribable relationship? When Paul said, "...comprehend with all the saints," he was saying that this relationship, though limited to the saints, is available to all the saints. We are uncomfortable with the word "saints" because of a stereotype that is fixed in our minds. We tend to think of saints as people who pray at least 23 hours a day and never make a mistake. That, obviously, is not Paul's intent. The word "saint" literally means "holy one." There are two ideas Paul had in mind when using this word. It describes a Christian who has been set apart for God. It also describes one whose life has been cleansed and is daily living an increasingly pure life, like the Lord.

Paul continued his mind-stretching statement, saying, "and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." Paul, again, is groping for words to express what God had revealed to him. The human mind does not grasp the vastness of the truth of God in one sweeping discovery, but rather a piece at a time; always grasping just a bit more than yesterday, but less than it will tomorrow. The word translated "know," "ginosko" means just that. Paul is exulting at the idea of grasping bits of truth about the vastness of the love of God that previously had been beyond his ability to grasp. It is like he was saying, to know that which is beyond knowing. It is to grasp more each day than was within their spiritual grasp.

The word translated "surpasses" is interesting. The form of the word includes two forms that both stand for ongoing action. It is a way to emphasize incomplete, ongoing action. It is like saying it surpasses and never stops surpassing. This word comes from the Olympic games for discus throwing. The winner was the one whose disc went beyond, surpassed the disc of all the other competitors. Paul was trying to describe knowledge that goes beyond the ability to grasp. It is experience that is so great, so intense it cannot be accurately defined.

Paul is saying that the growing discovery of the love of Christ leads to a filling to the point of running over of the presence of God. This is a great deal more than simply being forgiven.

Again, Paul is reaching for superlatives when he spoke of overflowing with the fullness of God. In that culture, they had a standard for measurement. You would fill the proper container to the point that it ran over on all sides. You could then call it "full." It is the discovery and experience of the greatness of the

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love of God beyond the ability of the human mind to grasp knowing that if one studied a lifetime, he would only scratch the surface of the greatness of God. The limits of language are again getting in Paul's way of expressing his wonderful thought. Note that Paul said, "you may be filled." This is not something one gains by studying hard. It is, rather, something that God by His indwelling spirit grants to us. To those who abide in Christ, they are granted to receive, to the point of overflowing, more than the human mind can grasp of all that God is. This is what Moses pleaded for on Mount Sinai when he said to God, "Show me your glory!" Frankly, this thought causes one to kneel in humble awe before both the greatness and the mercy of God.

The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him I John 2:4, 5

God spoke of "the one who says, 'I have come to know Him...'" He did not use the word for "know" that means "total, absolute knowledge," but the one that describes "beginning to discover." Ultimately, the absolute justice of God over all people and situations is beyond the ability of the human mind to totally comprehend. There are some pieces of information, however, that we can grasp. First, God's judgment, as described in Scripture, is always a balance between justice and mercy. He is the "Lord God," "Jehovah Elohim," "the merciful judge." Whether new to the faith or a servant of long-standing, we are called upon to obey God's commands. IF a person claims to "know" ginosko" God, THEN fails to obey God's commands, as God views that understanding, would mean that the believer in question was participating in a dishonest response. How God would determine that and act upon it, only He would really know. Knowing God is not all about intellectual discovery. Rather it is about obeying His commands, living His life after Him and in the process discovering who He really is. Abiding and obeying are two sides of the same coin.

There is a serious contrast between verses four and five. It is the contrast between obedience and disobedience, between learning about God and discovering who God is as you obey His commands.

In verse five, Paul identified some specific benefits of this obedience. Paul said, "in Him the love of God has truly been perfected." It means to bring to completeness. It is to fully realize the implications of a truth. It is to be fully-grown, to consummate an agreement which can never be undone. It expresses a confidence that we really are in Him. The form of this word is passive. It means that this is something done to or for us, not something we accomplish on our own.

The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. I John 2:6

John comes very close to a definition of abiding in this verse. He described abiding by saying it is living God's life after Him – "Walk in the same manner as He walked." It is doing what Christ did, the way He did it, for the same reasons He did it. Because this was true of Jesus and the Father, when people looked at Jesus, they knew what the Father was like. In the same way, if we live His life after Him, people will be able to look at our lives and know what Jesus is like. This is the reason that Jesus used the image of the vine and the branches. The branch simply makes it possible for the character of the vine to be found in the makeup of the grapes.

I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. I John 2:14

The Greek text reads differently. You might translate it this way, "I write to you children because you know the Father. I write to you fathers because you know the one who is from the beginning. I write to you young men because you are strong and the word of God in you dwells and keeps on dwelling and you have overcome the evil one." We will look at the Greek translation rather than our text.

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As one can see, John commends the children, the fathers and the young men. Look again at what John said to the groups to whom he wrote.

CHILDREN – "you know "ginosko" the Father." (which means growing knowledge rather than full knowledge.)

FATHERS – ("You know (ginosko) the one who is from the beginning." This appellation is reserved, in most instances, for God the Father. In this instance, it must refer to Jesus, the Son. It indicates eternity.

YOUNG MEN – You are strong. The word of God abides in you and keeps on abiding in you. You have overcome the evil one.

John's affirmations, in all three instances, are most complimentary.

Observe, also, that John is equally complimentary of people in each age group. That is not necessarily true in our situation. Christian maturity tends to be found mostly in the lives of the much older members of the body of Christ. In view of John's statement here, he claims such a level of Christian maturity for believers in every age level within the body of Christ.

As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 1 John 2:24

The words "let that abide in you" are in the form of a command. One might translate this, "Let that abide in you (the good news) and keep on abiding in you which you heard from the beginning." John wrote to a group of Christians who had undergone severe persecution for their faith. They had not given up their faith, but they were struggling. It is interesting that John used the same word for "abide" on three occasions in this one verse. Obviously, John used the repetition to emphasize his point. The first two uses of this word are like saying "remember" or "keep in mind." It is like he had said, "As for you, remember what you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning is kept in mind, you also will take up residence in the Son and in the Father." This is a command. John is saying that abiding in the Father and in the Son requires an ongoing awareness of the teachings that led these believers to salvation. John said that abiding in the Father and the Son involves a relationship that is based upon the teaching of the good news that they had already received.

We need to ask why John would say, "abide in the Son and (abide) in the Father," rather than to say, "abide in God"? One reason he might say it this way is that in his gospel, he recorded Jesus talking about Jesus and the Father abiding in those who demonstrate their love for Him through their obedience to His command. John has plumbed the depths of the believer's relationship with God. In this verse, he has said, in effect, that IF the message that initiated our relationship with God is a vital part of our life and thought, THEN we will take up residence in Jesus and the Father in the same way that the Father and the Son abide in us. Again, this is not so much a location as it is a relationship. It is a mind-stretching way to describe a way of life in which the Father, Son and Spirit are a part of everything we are and do. It describes a lifestyle in which we are an active part of all that God is doing in His world. Only holy silence adequately expresses the awe that this creates within us.

The Father and the Son are one God and both are completely divine. They differ, however, in terms of their ministry. The Father is the ultimate authority in the Trinity. He commands and the Son and Spirit joyfully obey. The Father's commanding and the Son and Spirit's obeying are equally expressions of love and do not indicate different levels of importance. This being the case, however, we are affected differently abiding in each one. **Abiding in Jesus**, we are intensely impressed with His ministry of redemption. We would be keenly aware of the many things He taught about knowing what the Father is like and how to show the unbeliever the greatness of God by the way we live. It does not suggest that Jesus is less important than the Father. It does focus attention on our need for intense commitment to Jesus and the need for an increasingly holy way of life.

Again, **abiding in the Father**, our attention would be focused on the expressions of His ministry. We would find ourselves fascinated by His power, which has no limits. We would be intrigued by His freedom

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from time and space. As our attention was riveted to Jesus ministry of redemption, so our focus upon the Father's rule of justice and mercy over all creation would be no less fascinating. Because He is absolutely holy, we would be moved to become increasingly holy, to be like Him. Because He is changelessly committed to drawing all mankind to Himself, we would find ourselves moved to pattern our commitment after His. What a wonderful investment of ourselves and our purpose in life!

And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. 1 John 2:27

An anointing is a visual act that signifies being set apart for God for a specific purpose or task. Both David and Saul were anointed, set apart by God to be king over Israel. In the same way, Aaron was anointed to be the priest of God. Having been anointed by God, He teaches His anointed servant that which is needful to carry out the specific mission for which one was anointed. This is not a plea against theological education as some take it to be. It is, rather, a beautiful acknowledgement that there are times when God, by His Spirit, teaches the available servant that which is necessary to carry out His will for their ministry.

All across the former Soviet Union there are a host of pastors of congregations in villages and hamlets. These pastors have no formal theological training. Still, they have been Spirit taught that which was necessary to be a faithful witness.

John said, "just as "IT" has taught you." We must identify what "it" represents. "IT" refers to the divine instructions that accompany His anointing. John was saying that the divine instructions teach us to abide in Him – Christ. It is one thing to be divinely instructed concerning our anointing, but it is contingent upon our abiding in Christ. It is a way of saying effective service in the task for which God has anointed us requires that we abide in Christ.

And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. 1 John 2:28

One of the characteristic features of I John is his use of apparent age designations – Fathers, little children, young men, etc. It appears that he is thinking of people who have been Christians for different lengths of time and maturity.

This verse describes some of the results of abiding in Christ. There are two mentioned here:

- a. **THAT WE MAY HAVE CONFIDENCE ...AT HIS COMING.**" By confidence, he means to speak freely without reservation concerning consequences. It is to speak boldly with clarity. It is to declare the simple truth having no fears of what will happen. John's inference here is that those who do not abide in Christ have no confidence or boldness to face Christ at His coming.
- b. **THAT THEY WILL NOT SHRINK AWAY FROM HIM IN SHAME AT HIS COMING.** We need to establish why those who abide will not shrink away in shame from Christ when He comes. Christ's return does not remove the shame of guilt. The shame can be removed, but it is because of our redemption, not His coming. In this statement, John said that the redeemed can abide in Christ and in abiding retain a conscience free from incriminating disobedience. It does not make us perfect, but forgiven to the point that we do not feel guilt in His presence.

No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 1 John 3:6

At first glance, this seems shocking. The Greek text gives us help in understanding what John said. One might better translate this verse, "No one who abides in Him sins and goes on sinning." Or one might say, "No one who abides in Him makes a lifestyle of sinning." John is not talking about sinless perfection. This "taking up residence in God" lifestyle expresses itself in a growing imitation of the character of God. It is to day-by-day increasingly becoming more and more like Jesus. Jesus came in physical form to show

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the human race what the Father is like. Jesus, however, is no longer here in physical form. As people observe the way we "abide in Him," they will increase in understanding what Jesus is like. It is a way of saying there is a spiritual quality to abiding in God. In verse five, John said there is no sin in God. Abiding in Him is being holy as He is holy and doing the things He does.

But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 1 John 3:17

Another evidence of the love of God abiding in one's life is the presence of compassion in our dealings with those in need. Compassion is an essential character quality in God. If we would abide in Him, then the qualities of His character must be evident in our daily life. It is to be forgiving as He is forgiving. It is to be compassionate as He is compassionate. Indeed, it is to increasingly demonstrate every quality of character the Scriptures identify as being what He is. Abiding in Him will evidence itself in doing His deeds after Him for the same reasons He did them.

And the One who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. 1 John 3:24

In this verse, John gives us two ways we can be certain that we participate in this intimate relationship with God. If we obey God's commands, we abide in Him. Second, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to reveal to us that this intimate relationship is intact.

Observe that John speaks of this intimate relationship differently in this verse than he spoke of it previously. I John 3:6, and the previous references, speak of "abiding in Him." In 3:24, however, John said, "He...abides in Him and He in us." Abiding is a mutual, intimate relationship, not a location or an action.

And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 1 John 4:16-17

John understands and teaches the love of God more clearly than anyone else in the New Testament. John has stated this in the form of a definition. However, it is a definition of love and not a definition of God. This is a conditional statement. One might say, "IF we abide in love (or let love be the characteristic that identifies us) THEN we abide in God and He abides in us. This is a way of saying that agapae love is the atmosphere in which this intimate relationship thrives and grows yet more intimate. Love is the foundation upon which compassion, forgiveness, kindness, humility and all of the qualities of God-likeness grow and increase within us. This is what happens when we abide in God and He abides in us. We need to be clear that any love that exists in us originates in God. As we begin and increase in love, we begin to participate in an intimate relationship with God that is characterized by His love. Some people deal with this as though God needs to be convinced to enter into such a relationship with us. God is the one who initiated the relationship with Adam and Eve. He is still the initiator.

Letting love be the identifying characteristic of our lives is the way love is brought to completeness. The word "perfected" seems to frighten people. It strikes them that John spoke of love that is flawlessly perfect. The word translated "perfected" means "to bring to completeness, to consummate, to bring to finality." It is to allow love to reach maturity, completeness in our lives. As love increasingly reaches maturity in our lives, one of the results is that we have a growing confidence concerning the coming day of judgment because our lives more and more reflect His character. Love is the atmosphere of this mutually intimate relationship we share with God. The day by day expression of God's love in our activities is the preparation to stand confidently before God in the day of judgment. John concludes verse seventeen with a brief description of what an "abiding" life is like. "As He is, so are we in the world." His love brings us to the place of total identification with God.

ABIDING IN CHRIST

Think carefully about the ministry of Paul. He spent his whole early life focusing on the Jewish people and their worship of God. Unfortunately, that focus included a great deal of arrogance and superior feeling against the Gentiles and especially against those who believed in Christ as Messiah. Yet as he came to "know" Christ, he abandoned his former lofty position in relation to the Gentiles; as he came to abide in Christ, there grew in him a compassion for the very ones he had taken such a violent stand against for so many years.

Look at the ministry of Moses. By no means a perfect man, still there rose within him a love for the people God committed into his care. It was so strong that he willingly volunteered to be blotted out of the book of righteousness in order that these people might not be destroyed. This is the discernment and practice of the love which characterizes God.

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 2 John 9

Another beautiful evidence that we abide in God is that we are in harmony with the things Jesus taught. The test is simple. If we are in harmony, both in belief and practice, with the teachings of Jesus, then we participate in a special, intimate relationship with both Jesus and the Father. This is what Peter meant when he spoke of "participating in the divine nature." II Peter 1:4

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. Romans 8:23

In this verse, Paul attempted to describe if not define what adoption is. In Romans chapter eight, Paul spoke of the whole creation groaning in anticipation of the coming glory. For those adopted into God's forever family, there will be a time of groaning, a struggle in anticipation of that time when our adoption is brought to completion – the redemption of the body.

Paul speaking of those who are in Christ, said that we have "the first fruits of the Spirit." This is an Old Testament sacrificial reference. The first fruits were the part of the crop that was to be given to God. It was considered to be the very best part of the crop. "The first fruits of the Spirit" describes that great work of the Holy Spirit in transforming our personality and character into greater Christlikeness. Paul used the picture of adoption, of being brought into God's family as a way to speak of our eventual entrance into God's eternal presence. This was also Paul's way to indicate that "adoption" is a process as well as an act. It brings transformation day by day and culminates by being ushered into His eternal presence.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. Romans 9:3-5

Paul used the image of "adoption" for a specific purpose. It was no secret that Israel was constantly finding ways to alienate themselves from God. Originally, Israel was not the people of God. God took Israel to be His children as though they were natural born. God "adopted" Israel for no deserving reason. He chose to make Israel His family just as God made mankind in His image in the creation story.

In these verses, Paul identified six special blessings God had given the Israelites. One of these was "the adoption as sons." Paul classified this adoption along with the giving of the law and the sacrifices of the temple. It is on a par with the promises of God that He cannot change. This gives us an impression of just how great this adoption was considered to be in Israel, especially being adopted into God's family. This adoption is personal; a personal quality of character.

Observe that Paul said of Israel, "to whom belongs this adoption as sons and the glory..." In Scripture, things tend to be listed in the order of their importance, though not exclusively. This New Testament

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adoption is as meaningful to Israel as the glory of God revealed in the Old Testament picture of God, as significant as the pillar of smoke hovering above the tabernacle giving guidance to all Israel as a father guides his son. This adoption opens to us a discovery of the glory of God as revealed both in the cloud around the tabernacle as well as in the presence of Jesus Christ.

In order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Galatians 4:5

In Galatians chapter four, Paul used the image of a son in the family in contrast to a servant in the family. He mentioned both similarities and differences. This adoption is made possible by God sending His Son to redeem us. This redemption leads to ultimate adoption. Our adoption, being brought into the family, is a divine action, not a human one. God wants us to avoid eternal punishment, but he wants more than that. We are redeemed in order that He might bring us into His family.

In verse four, Paul pointed out that in our sinful state, we were like the bond servant, but God made a surprising move – In Jesus Christ, God entered human form and experience in order to adopt the slave as a son.

In verses six and seven, Paul described the results of this adoption. Observe that this was accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The process takes two forms in the adopted sons.

- a. The Spirit cries "abba Father" – "daddy, daddy!" This is both the Greek and the Hebrew word for "father." It represents both Jews and Gentiles. It is the picture, the emblem of belonging.
- b. It is the guarantee that we are given the right to appeal to God for our needs and expect a positive response the same as a child expects his father to provide whatever his little heart desires. The Spirit clarifies the shadowed truth that in our adoption, we have moved from being a servant to being an heir. There are volumes involved in this discovery that we belong. We share the family reputation. People treated Lot in the same way they would treat Abraham. This is clear in the fact that scores of men risked their lives and fortunes to go with Abraham to bring Lot back.

We take on the family identity. Lot was expected to conduct himself in the way that Abraham's immediate family would conduct themselves. People would expect an adopted son to conduct himself in harmony with the values of his new family. In our case, God expects our lifestyle to reflect His own. When this relationship between Abraham and Lot broke down, Abraham and Lot separated.

We are safe. In that culture, the family unit was the basic source of mutual protection. If one member was threatened, for whatever reason, it is the responsibility of every other member of the family to safeguard that family member from harm, captivity or incarceration. This is the reason that the desert people, to this day, take a dim view of any child who would opt to leave the family for any reason. If that person leaves, then the defenses of the family are just that much weaker.

We take responsibilities. The adopted son was expected to work and further the family fortunes and reputation like every other member of the family. We are expected to take the mission of the family of God as our mission in life. It is a contradiction in terms to speak of an inactive Christian.

We are part of the family defense. In the same way that the rest of the family would come to our aid if we were in any kind of trouble, no matter what the cause, so we have the responsibility to be available for the defense of any and all of the family if need be. Our lives are part of one another. One is never free to think solely of himself. Every choice and decision must be made with the entire family of God in mind.

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, Ephesians 1:5

The word translated "predestined" is "prooridzo" and means "to determine beforehand." It has nothing to do with worthiness. It has everything to do with grace that is determined to offer a family relationship to undeserving people. This adoption is an expression of God's kind intention. God wills His erring people to be adopted into the family.

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He predestines; He determines in advance that we should be adopted. This left no room for our efforts to produce this gift. Our adoption was not a belated thought on the part of God. God, from eternity, predestined that we should be adopted into His family. This is an act of divine kindness that one could never fully understand.

IN REFLECTION

Retracing our study of abiding, we gather several pieces of information. The biblical message about abiding focuses on two areas:

1. The ingredients of abiding.
2. The results of abiding.

It is clear that taking up residence in God and He in us is universally available to those who are saints; those whose sins are forgiven. Abiding in God and His taking up residence in us is a relationship, not a location. It represents an atmosphere in which there is in-depth exchange between those so involved. Abiding requires both belief and trust. It is the certainty that Jesus is the redeeming Son of God and in every decision and experience in life staking my life on that truth. Without a lifestyle of obedience, there can be no abiding. Jesus, in John 14 and 15, makes it clear that obedience is the evidence of loving God. This obedient love lifestyle is the foundation, the means that makes abiding possible.

The teaching about abiding places stronger emphasis upon the results of abiding. Abiding is the source of our life and identity.

While preaching in the Ukraine, I met a pastor who had been imprisoned in the same prison with the famous author, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In his book on imprisonment in the Gulag, Solzhenitsyn wrote of this pastor as "the Baptist." This pastor is in his very late 80's and still pastors a large, growing congregation. This pastor was happy and exuberant. Through an interpreter he told me of the joy of his imprisonment because he was deeply aware of the presence of Christ in his life, even in his suffering.

On one occasion I was preaching in a country that takes extreme exception to the presence of Christians. As I finished the sermon I saw the police enter the back of the church and the pastor grabbed my arm and ushered me out the back door. Later that day I had the opportunity to preach again in that same city. I saw the evidence of the indwelling Christ in these people who regularly lived under the threat of physical harm and imprisonment. They would gladly go to prison on behalf of Christ.

This abiding relationship is the source of our knowledge, the doorway to knowing God. Abiding enables the believer not to sin as a lifestyle. This source of eternal confidence is the antidote to fear. Where there are saints abiding in God and He in them, you will find a growing compassion and a longing for our final redemption. Charles Wesley understood the relationship of abiding quite well when he penned the words,

*O come and dwell in me,
Spirit of power within,
And bring the glorious liberty
From sorrow, fear and sin!*

THE VINEDRESSER

John 15:1-12 is the only passage in the New Testament where the intimate relationship between God and His servants is described by the use of this image. Jesus had told his disciples repeatedly that He was going to die, but they were not able to receive the message before this time. Finally, as they gathered to celebrate the Passover, Jesus said it again and they finally heard and believed Him. This created great panic among the 12 disciples. John used chapters 13-17 of his gospel to record Jesus' attempt to comfort and teach His disciples the message He had been trying to teach them for three years. In the midst of this message, 14:1-15:12, Jesus gave some important information about this intimate relationship between Himself, the Father and the believer.

In John 14, we have seen how tenderly Jesus spoke to these frightened disciples about abiding in Him and in the Father. Now, in chapter 15, Jesus is going to show the disciples what this abiding is all about. Without this passage, the disciples in any era might get the impression that abiding was given just to be a source of comfort for a frightened body of believers. It is that, but it is much, much more.

Only shepherding was a more common occupation than vinedressing or farming in Israel. The title "vinedresser" also applied to associated vocations – plowman, husbandman, gardeners and tillers.

God is mentioned as Father on four occasions in John 15:1-12. Jesus talked about something His disciples understood very well. Some of these disciples probably came from farm families. All of them would have grown grapes at their home. In this passage, Jesus gave a careful description of the task of the vinedresser. He made it very clear that He was talking about God the Father.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. John 15:1

The vinedresser in this verse is God the Father. The vineyard, the whole creation, belongs to the vinedresser. This vineyard exists for the benefit and purposes of the vinedresser. By identifying Himself as the vine, Jesus was saying that He belonged to the Father. He also was saying that the preoccupation of the Father is with Jesus, the Vine. By saying that He was the "true vine," Jesus also was saying that there was a false vine. Indeed, there were many who were false. Jesus had said this a number of times, but it is questionable whether or not the disciples understood what He was talking about. In this verse, Jesus carefully described the ministry of the Father – the total care of the vine and branches.

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. John 15:2

Later on, Jesus will identify the branches as His disciples, the church. The occupation of the Father/Vinedresser is to keep close watch on the vine and branches. Observe that Jesus said that the vinedresser would prune any branch that did not bear fruit. Jesus did not say the same thing about the vine. This is because the vine does not bear fruit. This is the task of the branches. At the baptism of Jesus, the voice from heaven said, "This is my Son in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus made it clear that the Father's desire for the branch is that it would bear fruit. We must keep in mind that in the natural world the fruit is the plant's attempt to reproduce itself. Apples are good to eat, but that is a secondary purpose. The apple contains several seeds and the pulp of the apple supports and nourishes these seeds in an attempt to grow an additional apple tree.

The Father oversees the growth of both the vine and the branches. Along with Jesus, we are the objects of the Father's care.

In the New Testament, the word "fruit" describes the product of something. The New Testament also speaks of fruit in other ways. In Galatians 5:22, Paul spoke of the fruit of the Spirit. It is that which is produced and reproduced as the Holy Spirit guides and purifies our lives. As Paul described it, this fruit represents a number of Christlike qualities that will increasingly enable the people of the world to see in us what God is really like.

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In Philippians 1:11, Paul spoke of "the fruit of righteousness." This is the quality of life that is produced by God in the godly person. In Hebrews 12:11 the author spoke of the "peaceable fruit" which is the product of His chastening.

Fruit must have a double meaning in the life of the believer. It is to reproduce oneself in the life of others who come to Christ through our witness. It also suggests the reproducing of the qualities of the life of Jesus in the way we live our lives. In the same way that Christ came to earth in the form of a man to show what the Father is like, we are to reveal what the quality of Jesus' character is like by the way we live our lives. Jesus said the Father, the Vinedresser, "takes away every branch that does not bear fruit." Too often we do not stop to think about what Jesus meant when He used this image. It does indicate that those who do not reproduce themselves in their ministry to the unsaved and those who do not reveal the quality of the life of Jesus in the way they live are not fulfilling the Father's intention for their lives. In the Father's vineyard there are two kinds of branches: those that bear fruit and those who do not; those who fulfill the Father's purpose and those who do not.

Jesus said, "The branches he prunes." The word translated "prunes" is "katharos" and means "to cleanse" or "make pure." This word is the basis of our English word "cathartic." In the New Testament, this word can mean "to prune" or "cut off." It also has another reference. In that time and culture, grape vines grew along the ground rather than up across a trellis wire as we have today.

Their climate was hot with little rain. Where the branches touched the ground at the point where the grapes were to grow, mildew would grow and grapes would not grow there. The vinedresser did two things:

- a. He placed a rock right next to the place where the vine went into the ground. During the day, that rock would get hot. Their nights are very cold. The cold air against the heat of the rock produced condensation and watered the plant nearly every day.
- b. The word translated "prunes" also meant to "lift up." The vinedresser would lift up the mildewed branch and place a small rock under it. Raised up, to the rays of the sun, the mildew would dry up and the branch would again produce grapes.

As we begin to bear fruit, the Father, the Vinedresser, will watch us closely. If anything happens to defer fruit bearing, the Father will do whatever is necessary to remove whatever inhibits the growth of fruit in our lives.

It is clear that the Father is the one responsible for the fruit in our lives. It is not something that we can do by ourselves. Again, the Father not only wants us to bear fruit, he wants us to bear more fruit. This is to be a continuing, growing process.

Jesus did not want them to think they were total failures. He encouraged them when He said, "You are already clean because of the word." It is a way of saying that everything necessary for growing an even greater crop of fruit is already present in your life.

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. John 15:8

Jesus made a point quite clear. The emphasis mentioned more than once in this passage is that the intended purpose of our lives is to bear much fruit. From a negative standpoint, God the Father is not glorified by our greatest achievements. God is glorified as we bear much fruit. Fruit bearing is the plant's attempt to reproduce itself. It is only secondarily a source of food. God the Father is glorified as we bend every effort to reproduce our life of faith in the lives of those who do not know Him. Again, the Father is glorified as the qualities of Jesus' character are reproduced in us and serve as a model, an example for others to observe. The evidence of our discipleship is not in repentance, not in baptism, but our capacity to bear fruit.

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. John 15:9

This passage is not about grape vines, but about an extensive, intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father and between Jesus, the Father and the believer. Observe that each time this relationship is mentioned,

THE VINEDRESSER

the relationship between Jesus and the Father is an illustration of the relationship they wish to pursue with the believer. The way this sentence is structured, points to a comparative situation. The use of the words "just as" highlights this comparison. Jesus has made His relationship with the Father a model for our relationship with Him and the Father.

Observe, also, that the atmosphere in which both of these relationships take place is agapae love. The mutual love between Jesus and the Father is the basis upon which both of these relationships are built.

This verse ends with a command – "Abide in my love." The word translated "abide" is "meinate" and means "to stay," "to continue unchanged, to take up residence, to be in close union with or to indwell." The form of this word stresses the fact that this is an accomplished relationship in which the believer endlessly dwells, takes up residence. It is an intimate relationship and never ceases to be just that. As indicated elsewhere, the word "in" has two meanings:

- a. It suggests a definite location. This is the most common use of the term.
- b. It also suggests "influence." To be "in Christ's love" is to be totally, thoroughly influenced by His person and His love. That is exactly what Jesus was saying in this instance. Jesus has described a relationship more than a location.

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. John 15:10

In verse ten, Jesus continued His description of the way He is reproducing in us the relationship He sustains with the Father. Jesus continued describing this relationship rather than setting up rules under which the relationship can exist.

It is a way of saying that obedience is the foundation upon which this relationship exists. Jesus previously said His relationship with the Father is the model for our relationship with Him and the Father.

The result of Jesus' obedience to the commands of the Father is that He takes up residence in the Father; His life is molded and shaped by the influence of the Father upon Him. Obedience to the commands of Jesus and the Father is the evidence of our love for Them. It is also the basis upon which this intimate relationship between Jesus, the Father and the believer is sustained. As we abide in Jesus and the Father, we are molded and shaped by their character. The quality of their holy lives is formed and demonstrated in the way we live our lives. As Jesus abode in the Father, He was able to show what the Father was like. Again, as we abide in Them, people will see in us what the Father and the Son are like. The essence of this unique relationship is the obedience that demonstrates our love for them.

IN REFLECTION

As Jesus sought to comfort and encourage His disciples, He used this image of the vinedresser – His Father. First and foremost, we belong to the Vinedresser as children belong to their father. We must always keep in mind that the vinedresser has a very specific purpose in mind for all He does – to make us more fruitful. Fruit is basically the plant's attempt to reproduce itself. This would involve enabling us to more nearly reflect the qualities of the Father as demonstrated in the life of His Son. It would also involve reproducing the life we have "in Christ" in those who are attracted by the quality of our lives.

Obedience is the foundation on which the fruitful life is based. Obedience is the evidence of our love for God. Ultimately, as our lives are transformed into His likeness, the result is that He is glorified. There is a hymn, written by Cleland B. McAfee that ultimately speaks to what we have been trying to share.

*There is a place of quiet rest near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.
O Jesus blest Redeemer, Sent from the heart of God,
Hold us who wait before Thee near to the heart of God.*

Quoted from THE HYMNAL For Worship and Celebration, Word Music.

THE VINE

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. John 15:1

The existence of a "true vine" must of necessity indicate that there is, or can be, a vine that is not true. Further, it also suggests that the teaching of this passage cannot be true of one who is not the true vine. There are and have been many who are false vines. Jesus is the only one who was nurtured by the Father, the Vinedresser.

Some people have the image of the Father, the Vinedresser, as one who desperately searches for an opportunity to tear out a nonproductive vine. That was not Jesus' message. Rather, the vinedresser takes great delight in enabling an unproductive branch to achieve its purpose in life. This is exactly what the Father longs to accomplish in the life of the unproductive branch. He wants to establish an intimate relationship with that branch in order to make it as productive as it was intended to be.

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. John 15:4

We will be returning to this verse again soon. First, however, we need to observe what Jesus said about the Vine, Himself. Our abiding in the Vine, taking up residence in Him, is essential to fruit bearing. In this verse Jesus identified the branches as the disciples, the believers. The vine is the source of all that the branch needs in order to bear fruit.

As you look carefully at this verse, you will notice that it contains two sentences. The first sentence contains a double command. One might literally translate it, "You abide in Me and I (abide) in you." The word "abide" is written in the aorist active imperative form. The meaning of this form is simple.

- a. Aorist tense – this is completed action and places emphasis upon the action and not on the time when it occurred.
- b. Active voice – the subject "you" is performing the action
- c. Imperative mood- - this is a command.

The "abiding" is something that we must do. God does not do it for us. It is a deliberate action of our will. The word "abide" is said only once, but it is implied a second time. This is a literary tool to create a strong emphasis. We should keep in mind that Jesus gave a command, not an option.

The word translated "abide" is "meinate". It is used nine times in John's gospel. Again, it means "to take up residence," "to pitch a tent and stay a while." The intent, of course, is that the person would become a part of this special relationship and not move away from it. It is as though Jesus said, "I command you to stay in Me."

As we see in John 14, "in Christ" has a very special connotation. It is like being locked together, to be inseparable. In times of stress and great frustration, it is encouraging to be reminded that Christ abides in our lives as thoroughly as we abide in him.

In the second sentence of John 15:4, you will find a comparison identified not by the words "if...then," but by "as...so." This identifies the fact that Jesus is going to use a comparison to help His disciples understand what He said, "AS the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine." This is the part of the sentence that the disciples would understand very well. "SO neither can you unless you abide in Me." This is the part that they did not understand at all. This was one of Jesus' favorite ways of teaching. He would take something they understood very well to explain something they had no way to understand. Abiding is essential to bearing fruit. It is essential in our quest to become increasingly like the character of Jesus. It is also essential in reproducing our transformed life in the lives of others who also seek forgiveness and a transformed life. The power to do this is in the vine, not in the branch. The branch is simply the conduit through whom the vine transmits His identity and character.

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In the very same way, there is no power in the branch to reproduce the transformed life. That strength is only in the vine. This is particularly encouraging to the person who has tried to be holy and failed. This was Paul's confession in Romans 7:14-21.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5

In John 15:1 and 15:5, Jesus identified Himself as "the Vine." This, as usual, was done for purposes of emphasis. Again, He also identified His followers as "branches." There is, in this verse, both a positive and a negative statement. Jesus began the statement with a condition, "He who abides in me and I in him..." The positive statement is also a repetition – "he bears much fruit." As previously mentioned, the idea of fruit has at least two connotations. In the image Jesus used, the fruit of "the Vine" is the attempt of the plant to reproduce itself. In the spiritual application Jesus used concerning abiding in Him, it is the attempt to reproduce the holy qualities of Jesus in the believer's life so that when people look at that person's life, they will have some positive impression of what Jesus was like.

The negative statement is also a repetition – "apart from Me you can do nothing." Jesus is the source of our strength and ability. We are only able to do what He, by His Spirit, enables us to do.

In this verse, Jesus spoke both of our abiding in Him and His abiding in us. We need to look at these two relationships more closely. In both instances, abiding is not so much a location as it is a relationship.

Jesus said, "He who abides in Me." Abiding in Christ requires a holy lifestyle because He is holy. Again, if I would abide in Christ, I must share His passion and commitment for the lost because that is the all-consuming priority of His life. I need to love Him as He loves me because that is the atmosphere of everything He is and does. If I would abide in Him, I must be obedient to Him as He has commanded His followers to be because He is obedient to the Father. I must be in harmony with His will and purposes. Then and only then can I abide in Him. In short, if I would abide in Him, I must be like Him. This is what Paul meant when he instructed the Ephesians to "be imitators of God." This is also what Peter meant when he said, "That we might be participants in the divine nature."

Jesus also said, "I (abide) in Him." If Christ is to abide in me, then I must accept the fact that I have no life aside from His life in me. I have no other identity aside from His identity displayed in my life. The Lord will seek out the lost, but He will not dwell in a life that is not increasingly committed to loving as He loves. If He would abide in my life, I must be prepared to surrender my will to His will; my life to His life lived in me.

When we abide in Christ, it is at His option. The purpose of our abiding in Him is to become more like Him. It is to fulfill the purpose of our creation – to share fellowship with Him. The terms of our abiding are always obedience in order to become more like Him. When I abide in Christ, it is the surrendering of myself to His love as a bride gives herself totally to the love of her life.

When Christ abides in us, it is at our option, Christ, by His Spirit, abides in us in order to give direction to our lives; in order to receive the worship of our gratitude. It is to enable us to be useful servants in His kingdom, but it is our option to choose.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. John 15:7

This, again, is a conditional statement. The stated condition is two-fold – "If you abide in Me" and "(if) my words abide in you." You will note that this statement is a bit different from the others that preceded it. Instead of saying, "I abide in you," Jesus said, "My words abide in you." This is the positive side of what Jesus said in verse six. Jesus spoke very carefully and we need to make the kinds of distinctions He made. The word "if" identifies a coming presentation of a conditional statement. When Jesus said, "IF you abide in me," He suggested that it is possible that one will not abide in Him. Again, when He said, "IF my words abide in you," He allows that it is quite possible that His words may not abide in us; may not have a controlling effect upon our lives. Both of these possibilities are real.

THE VINE

The primary purpose of this conditional statement, however, has to do with our prayers. Abiding in Christ and determining to allow His words to become the rule of our lives are both essential to answered prayer. David dealt with this issue when he said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me." Psalm 66:18.

Jesus said, "If you abide in Me." He has made this statement several times before. It means that His heart and passion must be a vital part of my life. It means I must love Him as He loves me and I must be in harmony with his purposes. Jesus also said, "If MY words abide in you." Throughout the Gospels, the phrase, "My words" usually meant both the teachings of the Scripture as well as the teachings and actions of Jesus. It seems appropriate to think of this statement in these terms as well. Jesus was not speaking of having His words literally in our bodies. He was talking about His words having an effect upon the way we live our lives. His words must give direction and correction to the way we face life every day. It is living His life in us to the extent that our lives become a clear description of what He is like.

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. John 15:9

The use of the words "just as" and "so" indicate that we are dealing with a very strong comparison. Jesus presents three things in this verse: There is a serious promise of His love for us. If one thinks carefully, this can be very shocking. Despite what we are and what our past has been, still He promised to love us without restrictions. This is difficult to fathom. He described His love for us. Ultimately, this is completely impossible to put into words. That being true, He tells us what it is like. We should keep in mind that the three uses of the word "love" in this verse are all the same word, "agapae." The love that Jesus described is exactly LIKE the love the Father expressed toward the Son. This is the ultimate agapae love. Again, the relationship between the Father and the Son becomes a model of the relationship He wants to sustain with each believer. Jesus loves us with the unique, limitless love that the Father showered upon Him. You get the impression of that Father's love for His Son when you remember His words at Jesus' baptism, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well pleased." Jesus also gave us a strong command. The word translated "abide" in this verse, is the same word that was used throughout this passage. The form of this word suggests a command that focuses on completed action rather than the timing of it. It is a way of adding serious emphasis to the statement. In essence, Jesus was saying, "Because of the love I give to you, you are to abide and go on abiding in My love." Abiding in Christ's love is to become a lifestyle for the obedient believer.

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. John 15:10

Again, Jesus used a conditional "IF...(THEN)" kind of statement to convey His message to these frightened disciples. The word "then" is in parenthesis because it is definitely understood, though not actually written. The condition is this, "IF we keep His commandments." The fact that this is stated conditionally indicates that it is possible to not "keep" His commandments. The word translated "keep" is "tereo". This word is used in several ways, but the foremost meaning has to do with obedience. That is precisely what Jesus meant in this instance. The word, however, also means "to persevere" or "to give careful attention to something." This is also involved in this statement. Here it means, "To give careful attention to obeying His commandments." It is to exert care to do exactly as Jesus commands.

Jesus identified the results of this obedience by saying, "You will abide in My love." Jesus' statement indicates that our obedience is the key to abiding in His love. It is the gift of God, not a human decision. The form of the word "abide" is very helpful here. It is the present indicative active form. One might translate it, "You will abide and never stop abiding in My love." Abiding in the love of Jesus becomes a lifestyle, not a single action.

Because this is a bit difficult to fully understand, Jesus illustrated the truth by using His relationship with the Father as a model. The words "just as" indicate that an exact comparison is being drawn. These two things are exactly alike.

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He said, "Just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love." His obedience is a model, an example of how He wants us to obey Him. The relationship Jesus shared with the Father is the same as the relationship He wants us to share with Him. Imagine! We will share in the same relationship Jesus shares with the Father! We must pause to describe what this means. On one side, it suggests that Jesus, in obedience to the Father's will, lay aside His majesty in order to accomplish the redemption to which the Father sent Him. In the same way, we must be prepared to do whatever is necessary in order to "fill up" the sufferings of Christ. There is a parallel in the results of this humble service as well.

Jesus came, according to Hebrews 1:1-4, as a revelation, a message from the Father. Jesus could rightly say to His disciples, "He that has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9. In the same way, we must keep His commandments so that when people view our lives, they will know what Jesus is like. This is awesome, to say the least.

*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.
John 15:11*

In this verse, Jesus spoke of His own motivation. In the process, however, He has given us some additional information concerning being "in Christ." Our obedience and abiding in Christ initiates joy in the heart of Jesus. At the same time, this obedience and abiding become the fullness of joy in our own lives. Jesus did not say we had to be perfect or outstanding. He did not say we could never falter or fail. He was saying that in our obedience and abiding we enable Him to have joy in our relationship and enable Him to fulfill one of His priorities – helping us to find fullness of joy. The obedience and abiding point us in the right direction to bring joy to the Father and fulfillment of our own.

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. John 15:12

Having said all the other things in this passage, Jesus gave His frightened disciples one more command – "Love one another as I have loved you." He did not present this as an option, but as binding a command as "thou shalt not steal" will ever be. More often than not, Christians will say that you cannot command love. One must agree that a parent cannot force a child to love him/her. A man cannot force a woman to love him as his wife. In fact, should he try, it would become increasingly impossible for her to love him. However, God can and does command His followers to love both Himself and His other servants. What is the difference? Unlike human slaves, whose actions alone can be commanded, the bondservants of God present not only their bodies to be commanded, but their wills as well. We surrender to God our will, to be, to do, to think exactly as He commands. When He commands us to love, our obedience is already promised. The command is not a threat, but simply a discovery of what it is He wishes us to be and do. Most if not all of us appreciate some people more than others. I remember thinking about a person who to my surprise really hurt me deeply. I harbored this pain for quite some time. One day in prayer, the Lord convicted me of this retained pain. I was reminded that being His servant did not free me from the possibility of interpersonal conflict. I then prayed each day that God would bless this person in a very obvious, but wonderful way. He did! I also noticed the icicles of a strained relationship began to melt and eventually it went away.

Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other. There are occasions when brothers and sisters in Christ can be most difficult people to love. Jesus was not talking here about total strangers, but about people who also love Him, people who are a part of His body, people who should know better than to hurt us, but sometimes do anyway.

Jesus described what this agapae love for sisters and brothers should look like – "Just as I have love you." This is a tall order, but it is very specific. He loved us while we turned our backs on Him and rebelled against Him; He loved us when we failed to be obedient more times than we succeeded. He loved us when our ties to our first parents' were greater than our commitment to Him. He did not wait until we changed to love us. He loved us whether we loved Him or not. He was prepared to forgive us one more time than we failed. That is exactly what He commanded His disciples to do. This was and is do-able with His help,

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if we are willing to be that obedient. As we have observed repeatedly, in this study, Jesus models the things He commands. We can never say we do not know what it would be like to obey His commands. He has provided the example for all He has commanded of us. In effect, Jesus was saying, "Use my love, with all its patience, forgiveness, and understanding, as a standard, a model by which to measure the way we are to love each other.

IN REFLECTION

We belong to God because He created us, but also because we have dedicated our lives to Him. All that God does in "pruning" our lives is to enable us to be the very best we can be with His help. As we mentioned, the vinedresser pruned only the branches, never the vine. Branches are extremely dependent. We need support. We depend on the vine for life and identity. All the help we need we will find as we take up residence in the vine, as we surrender to simply being the conduit through whom His life and identity will flow.

Though abiding is a command, it also releases the divine power that enables us to more carefully and completely reflect His character and presence. We set the agenda. Jesus will abide in us as completely as we are willing to abide in Him.

As we increasingly abide more completely in Him, there are several impressive results. We can literally ask for anything in keeping with His will and purpose and not be surprised when He provides it. The Father will be increasingly glorified as our fruit-bearing increases. We will discover a growing understanding of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son as we experience Christ's relationship with us. Greater yet, we become equal partners in that indescribable, intimate relationship in Christ as He is in the Father, the Father is in Him and we are in Them and they are in us.

THE BRANCHES

In the previous chapters we looked at the Vinedresser (God the Father) and the Vine (God the Son). In this part of the study, we want to focus our attention on the branches, those servants of God whose sins He has forgiven. As we focus our attention on the branches, the servants of God, we must keep in mind that in the New Testament era experience of growing grapes differs widely from our own.

In our economy, grapes are mostly grown on farms where that is their main or only crop. In that day, most everyone grew their own grapes. They grew grapes for three reasons: First they grew grapes to make wine, usually for their own consumption. Keep in mind that good water, in that part of the world, was and is a rarity. Second they grew grapes to dry them and make raisin cakes which were a delight to eat. Third, they grew grapes just to enjoy eating them.

As indicated earlier, we grow grapes up along trellis wires. This, however, requires either a lot of rain or constant watering. Remember that the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea are the only major bodies of water in the whole land. The smallest of America's Great Lakes would be many times larger than all three of these bodies of water put together.

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. John 15:2

Interestingly, people tend to focus their attention on the first statement and OFTEN ignore the second one. The first statement, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away" makes it clear that fruit bearing is essential to this intimate relationship with God. This next statement, however, indicates the intense longing of the Father, the Vinedresser. The Father's design, of course, is to find fruit.

Having found fruit, he prunes that branch in order to find even more fruit. The statement, "He prunes it" needs to be described. It can convey the idea of cutting away things that could be detrimental to the plant. These are called "suckers." They diminish the plant's ability to bear fruit. There is another element of this in the verse. This phrase "he prunes it" can also be translated "He lifts up." As previously mentioned, in that day, grapes grew along the ground rather than up along a trellis type structure. If the place where grapes should grow touched the ground, mildew would form and no grapes would grow there. The vinedresser was keenly aware of this and watched carefully for it.

He would lift up the branch and place a small rock under the affected area. The mildew would go away and grapes would form there. The emphasis in this verse is that God purposes to see fruit in the lives of the believers who share in the intimate relationship with Him. Those who share this intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father are expected to continually improve in this fruit-bearing process.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. John 15:4

As you can see, there are two sentences in this verse. In the first sentence, the word "abide" appears once and is understood a second time. It might read like this, "Abide in Me and I (abide) in you." In Greek when a word is used once and is implied a second time the form of the two words is considered to be the same. As it appears in the text, the form of the word "abide" is aorist active imperative. This means that it is a command; it is something that we do rather than something done to or for us; the tense of the word suggests something already accomplished with an emphasis on the action rather than the timing of it.

This describes a mutual situation. Jesus abides in us to the same extent that we abide in Him. He shares fellowship with us as intently as we do with Him. In the story of the vine, because there is mutual abiding, Jesus is as intent on providing the life sustaining nourishment as we are to maintain our purpose of being the conduit for His nurturing and a matrix where His fruit is produced. Our task is not only to produce fruit, but to produce more fruit.

Again, the word "abide" means "to take up residence." We should keep in mind that in this culture, one only "abides" with a person if they are completely at peace and harmony with each other. Jesus was

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stressing this fact when he told Zacchaeus he had to go to his home with him. Jesus did not lack a place to eat or stay. He did need to go into Zacchaeus' home and eat a meal with him. The Pharisees would not so much as speak to a tax collector. In doing this, Jesus sent a vivid message that though the Pharisees saw tax collectors as unredeemable, Jesus and the Father saw them as sinners They desired to restore. If there are no differences between the Lord and our lives, then we can abide in Him, but this would necessitate becoming increasingly holy.

If there are no differences between the Lord and us, then we will be seeking to reflect His character in our own. If there are no differences between us, we will seek to accomplish the things that are in keeping with His purposes for our lives. That is what abiding in Him is all about.

In this short sentence, Jesus also spoke about His abiding in us. Again, the word "abide" is a command. This raises the question, How does Jesus command Himself to abide in us?

He does not need a command. **He will abide in us as completely as we abide in Him.** It is more an affirmation of the fact that He will occupy as much of our lives as we will open to Him by our commitment to live His life after Him and dedicate ourselves to be available to live His life through us. It will require a deep desire to share this intimate relationship with Him no matter what the cost might be.

In the second sentence of this verse, Jesus drew a parallel comparison in order to help His disciples understand His message. As usual, Jesus described something they knew very well in order to use this to illustrate something they did not understand at all. "As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine..." You never find grapes on a vine, only on a branch. It was Jesus' way of saying though God has the power to act in human life and experience, He chooses to accomplish His purposes through dedicated people, the branches securely fastened to the vine. The branch on a grapevine is not independent and they knew it well. The branch draws its life, nourishment and identity from the vine.

Severed from the vine, the branch is dead and useless. The usefulness of the branch depends upon its abiding in the vine. The branch is simply a conduit for the life and identity of the vine to take form and be expressed.

"So neither can you unless you abide in Me." We have no life in ourselves with which to produce fruit. We also have no identity in ourselves with which to produce fruit that is like that which the vine represents.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. John 15:5

Having established the purpose and task of both the vine and branches, Jesus moved to apply this parallel to the lives of His disciples. Jesus could have simply said, "He who abides in me" period. This, however, would have failed to achieve some of the divine purposes. God wills that we bear much fruit. He also wills that there be intense fellowship between Himself and His servants as well as willing that the bearing of much fruit be a joint effort between Himself and those who love and serve Him.

Jesus concluded the verse with a stark statement. "For apart from me you can do nothing." The use of the word "for" indicates that the speaker is about to give a reason for his prior statements. The mutual abiding, of vine and branch, are absolutely essential to the life and work of the vine. In exactly the same way, the mutual abiding of Christ and His servants is absolutely essential to the disciples' production of "much fruit" as well as sharing intimate fellowship with the God who is his creator.

Across the centuries of the life of the church, many of Christ's followers have spent long years in prison. This is as up-to-date as today's news. Today, in a host of countries, there are followers of Christ languishing in prison because they dare to claim Christ as their Savior and long to share that good news with others. It is not their own inner strength that sustains them in joy as they suffer abuse. It is that mutual abiding that offers them the life and strength they need to be joyfully faithful in the midst of tragic, horrible conditions and abuses.

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you
John 15:7*

THE BRANCHES

Having said what is recorded in 15:6, Jesus then drew an important contrast. His logic is simple, but pointed.

- a. Failure to abide equals devastation
- b. Abiding equals receiving whatever we need to accomplish the impossible on behalf of our Lord. Here, again, Jesus used the "IF...THEN" conditional statement to help His disciples understand His message. There are two parts to the condition:
 - a. **If you abide in Me** It, again, means to take up residence. This can happen only if there is harmony and unity between the two people involved. It means that His character and our lifestyle must match.
 - b. **And (if) My words abide in you** The phrase "my words" describe the teaching of Scripture as well as His teachings and actions.

The result – "Ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you." For all the world, this sounds like a blank check and in one sense it is. It does not mean that we can use this like a rabbit's foot. It does mean that a lifestyle of abiding results in divine preparedness to grant our petitions. This is not super-generosity. It is the natural result of our values and goals being in harmony with His. This is Jesus' way of saying that in this intimate relationship there is a place to expect God to answer our prayers to the same extent that we abide in Him and His word abides in us.

By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. John 15:8

The Father – the Vinedresser – is glorified when those who share an intimate relationship with Him bear much fruit. By "glorified," Jesus meant the honor that is bestowed as a result of favorable opinion. We ascribe great glory to God as we bear much fruit. It naturally follows that if we do not bear much fruit, we deprive the Father of the glory He rightly deserves.

Jesus added a second ingredient to this statement. Bearing much fruit is a demonstration of the fact that we are His disciples. Again, if we do not bear much fruit, we cast serious doubt on whether or not we are His disciples.

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. John 15:9

The use of the words "just as" suggests that Jesus is drawing a strong comparison. He drew this comparison between the Father's love for Him and His love for those who abide in Him. There is total harmony between the Father's will and that of the Son. That harmony is so strong it reaches to the point of sacrifice.

When in the garden, Jesus was attempting to describe the indescribable for His frightened disciples. Jesus wanted them to know that despite their human frailty, His love for them paralleled the Father's love for Him

To this beautiful and moving picture, Jesus added a strong command. He commanded them to make a lifestyle of abiding in His love. It was a way of instructing them to abide in Him so completely that their lives and purposes would be in perfect harmony with His character and purposes. One wonders, in what way would the meaning be different if Jesus had said, "abide in Me"? To say, "abide in My love" is more pointed. Granted there is a relationship of love involved when one abides in Christ. However, when Jesus said, "abide in My love," He was much more specific. Abiding in Christ involves a host of wonderful, powerful relationships. Saying, "abide in my love" highlights one of the most awesome indescribable relationships one could possibly receive.

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. John 15:10

This verse represents yet another conditional statement in Jesus' attempt to spell out in detail the intimate relationship He and the Father wish to share deeply with those who abide. Keeping the commandments of Jesus is another way of referring to a life of obedience. This obedience is the key to an ongoing participation

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in the intimate relationship He has described for them. Here we see, again, Jesus exemplifying the teaching before He gives the command for them to do likewise.

The comparison Jesus made here serves two very important functions on our behalf. IF we, as Peter promised, "participate in the divine nature," THEN we must increasingly come to understand what He is like. If we look at the Biblical descriptions of Jesus' obedience to the Father's commands, we will discover a pattern by which to measure our own obedience to the commands of Jesus. Again, if we look at the beautiful relationship created by our obedience to Christ's commands, it will provide a tiny glimpse of just how vast and wonderful the ABIDING relationship between Jesus and the Father really is. This, in turn, serves as a goal in our growing relationship of "abiding in Him."

*These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.
John 15:11*

In this verse, Jesus spelled out two of the results, the consequences of their obedient way of life as they share in this intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father. First, their abiding results in bringing to completeness Jesus' joy in them. Observe that it was not their achievements that produced this joy. It was rather their abiding obedience.

Second, the result of their abiding obedience is the key to the fullness of their own joy. It naturally follows, however, that those not involved in this intimate relationship of obedience have no hope of experiencing the fullness of their own joy, much less His.

Study, again, these two results. One must struggle with the question, what is the difference between Christ's joy being in us and our joy being made full? First, in both instances, the source of joy grows out of abiding. Secondly, though the source of joy, in both instances is the same, the object of this joy appears to be slightly different. The object of Jesus' joy is the believers who abide in Him. Jesus, however, does not specifically identify the object of their joy. It appears that the two pictures Jesus presented here are mirror images of each other. Just as Jesus abides in them and His full joy is in them; even so, as they abide in Him, their overflowing joy is realized in the awe and wonder of His presence.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. John 15:12

In the divine plan, it is always as important to be in peace and harmony with people – Christians and non-Christians – as it is to be in peace and harmony with God. Jesus went a step further. He taught that our relationship with people is a proper reflection of our intimate relationship with God. When, in this verse, Jesus carefully taught, "This is My commandment, that you love one another" this fact adds a whole new dimension of meaning to His statement. One might express it this way, "Let your love for each other be a demonstration of your intimate relationship with Me and the Father." Frankly, there are many facets to the relationship Christians share with each other. On many occasions, we are left wondering just how do I express real love to a fellow member of the body of Christ? In this verse, Jesus has made it clear that in His love for us, He has given us a pattern by which to measure and direct our own relationships with each other. He loved us when we were anything but loveable. In the first century, Josephus, a non-Christian historian, was asked to describe the group of people who followed Jesus' teaching. He struggled with this for quite some time. Finally he responded "Behold how they love one another." Indeed, the central illustration of our transformed life is the way we relate to others within the body of Christ. Non-Christians are not focusing on our theology. They study our lives and relationships. The way they see us relate to each other is the measure of our credibility in their eyes.

Note, also, what Jesus added to this commandment, "Just as I have loved you." What a goal He has set for us! Because we are all human, we are imperfect in our relationships with each other. We will not do it instantly, but Jesus is commanding us to measure our agapae love for each other against His love for us. Imagine what the church would be like if we loved like this?

IN REFLECTION

THE BRANCHES

We must be clear about the mission of the branches – believers. Vines do not produce fruit; branches do. The branch is a channel, a conduit which delivers the identity and life of the vine to the site where fruit is to be produced. The purpose of the branch is to bear fruit. This fruit bearing requires abiding in the vine. Christ is the vine and if we will abide in Him, there must be a growing likeness of His character in our lives. We have no life in ourselves. Removed from the vine, we are useless in God's purposes. Bearing fruit depends totally upon abiding.

There are important results which accrue from abiding in the vine. We can ask whatever we wish and it will be done for us. Abiding in the vine brings glory to the Father. As we abide in the vine, we will be obedient to His command that we abide in His love. What a beautiful position!

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul groped for a way to describe our intimate relationship with Christ. He chose to do what Jesus did; he used a parallel example that everyone would understand completely in order to help people comprehend an issue that none of them understood at all. People did not understand our relationship with Christ at all. Paul used the human body as an illustration they all knew quite well.

The new Christians would know that the body was a unity, but made up of a great variety of parts. Obviously, each part of the body had a specific function that it carries out on behalf of all the other parts. The eyes see for the whole body. The feet walk for all the other parts. The lungs process oxygen for the hands, feet and every other part. The ears do the listening on behalf of the whole body.

Every part of the body is essential. There are no unnecessary parts. If one part of the body does not function, every other part is less by that much. The rest of the body will have to compensate for the loss the one part experiences. Granted, the person who becomes blind also experiences the compensation whereby the hearing increases in sensitivity. The walking, however, must of necessity be more tenuous than before. The human body is unique. No other body is exactly the same. There are several similarities, but no two are exactly the same. From finger prints to voice prints to DNA, we are so unique that these things can be used to positively identify every human being.

Every part of the human body is intimately related to every other part. If one part suffers, all the other parts sense that pain and respond to it. Pain in any part of the body will change the blood pressure, body temperature and the body's production of certain substances that enable it to defend itself and survive.

If one part of the body thrives – say the mind wins a spelling bee – the entire body shares the excitement and the rush of adrenaline. If one part falters, every other part attempts to make up for the lack one part displays. If a mountain climber's foot slips, the hands go into action, the mind whirls, the heart pumps blood faster, the lungs provides a greater supply of oxygen and the system provides an increased supply of adrenaline to enable the climber to reach safety again. The hearing of a blind person is many times more sensitive than it was in this same person before the onset of blindness. If one's legs are suddenly paralyzed, the arms will become much, much stronger.

Everyone is a dependent being. Not one of us is self-creating. Every part of our being is dependent upon every other part of our being. Every part of the body cares and provides for all the other parts of the body and is prepared to sacrifice itself on behalf of all the other parts.

Every part of the body takes its direction from the mind. The mind processes the impulses it receives from the eye and acts decisively upon that information to protect the body. The mind controls the production of certain vital substances to enable the body to protect itself or even to enable it to sleep. Without overt action, the mind monitors the heart beat so that we can sleep or work without even thinking about this heart activity. The hands and feet cannot move by themselves. It takes an action of the mind to move the body to achieve what it must do to run the body in less than favorable conditions.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function,..

Romans 12:4

This is the first mention of the church as the body of Christ. In this paragraph, Paul deals with the instruction to be humble. In the process, he drew a strong comparison between the church and the human body. This is emphasized by Paul's use of the words "JUST AS...SO." He held up the human body as an illustration of what the church should be like.

Paul identifies two facts about the human body.

- a. There are many members in one body.
- b. All the members of this body do not have the same task.

These are the basic facts about the human body. From these two initial statements a number of observations need to be made. For instance, the mind literally manages the rest of the body. Every part of the body is

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essential to the originally intended design of the body. The different parts perform their particular function on behalf of all the other parts. There are many more. Observe, however, that Paul does not focus attention on any of these except the two – many parts in one body and all the parts do not have the same task. This is because he is going to focus the primary attention on a description of what the body of Christ should be like. Observe, also, that Paul's discussion of the body of Christ grows out of the same two statements he made about the human body – "**many members in one body**" and "**all members do not have the same task.**" Everything Paul mentions in verses five through eight grows out of these two statements and applies them to what the church should be like.

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:5

In verse five, Paul said we are "members one of another." It is as though Paul said, "JUST AS there are many members, but one human body, SO in the church we are members of each other." Because we are members of each other, when one part of the body suffers, we are all a part of that situation and it is as much pain for us as it is for that part of the body. This is quite contrary to the modern individualistic notion that permeates most of the church. If we are part of one another, then the ailing part is expected to lean heavily upon the rest of the body for strength and support. By the same token, the parts of the body of Christ not directly affected by this suffering are called upon to be the strength and support the struggling member of the body needs, but does not have at the present time.

Paul, in this verse, inserts an important parenthesis into his logical presentation. We must keep in mind that all of the gifts and abilities possessed by each part of the body of Christ are according to the grace given to us. This involves both the identity of the specific gift we are to pursue on behalf of the body and the ability and strength to masterfully use that gift in such an effective way that the whole body benefits.

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith... Romans 12:6

Paul affirms that we have different gifts. Again, it is as though Paul said, "JUST AS all the members of the human body do not have the same task, SO in the body of Christ we all have different gifts." As Paul mentions elsewhere, if every part of the body were for eating, how would we see. It is interesting that all God's creating involves a complimentary function – the husband and wife complement each other. The parts of the human body complement each other. However, mankind has changed this intended complimentary function into a competitive one. We pose men and women in competition with each other. The different parts of the body of Christ were intended to compliment and serve each other. People, however, made the relationship a competitive one, claiming one gift is more important than another.

Paul begins to identify several specific functions that individual parts of the church, the body of Christ, are given to carry out. Notice, I said, "given" because JUST AS the hand did not choose to be a hand, SO the part of the body of Christ did not choose the function of prophesying. Nevertheless, our task is not to change that assignment, but "to prophesy according to the proportion of faith." The word translated "proportion" is "analogia". It means "to measure," "a proportion." Paul was saying that we need to carry out our gift responsibility of prophesying, or whatever it may be, on behalf of the rest of the body in proportion to our trust in God to prophesy through us. The greater our trust in God to prophesy through us, the greater our usefulness in speaking the word of God on behalf of the rest of the body that does not have the task of prophesying.

If service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; Romans 12:7

In verse seven, Paul continued describing the ministry of some of the parts of the body of Christ. He said, "if service, in serving." The word translated "serving" is "diakonia". It means "to attend, to serve, to render friendly offices." Some people in the body of Christ have the task of serving others. Their task is to give

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substantially of themselves for the comfort and benefit of others in the body. Paul said, if your task in the body is serving, then make your contribution on behalf of all the rest of the body by serving.

Paul continued by saying, "or he who teaches, in his teaching". It must be clear that "teaching" is not that you know things that others do not know. Teaching involves the discovery of necessary information and having the ability to convey that information to the rest of the body in a way that is helpful and meaningful for the whole body. God has not equipped every member of the body of Christ with the ability to teach. Those who were given that ability must use it on behalf of the rest of the body.

Or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:8

Paul said, "He who exhorts, in his exhortation." The word translated "exhorts" is a compound word, "parakaleo". It is composed as follows: The word "para" means "beside." The word "kaleo" means "to call." It is to invite someone to stand beside you. It is "to plead, to entreat, to implore," "to encourage, comfort and console." It is the word that identified an attorney, an expert in the law. When Pharisees would, in disobedience to their law, take widows to court in an effort to take their possessions or children because of failure to repay a loan, an expert in law would stand beside the poor widow as her "parakaleo." By his legal expertise, he would prevent the unscrupulous Pharisee from taking advantage of the widow and thus be her comfort. Beautifully, this is the word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit. There are those in the body who have been equipped by God to be comforters of the body of Christ by their wisdom and knowledge; to so guide the rest of the body in such a way that it will be protected from the unscrupulous and guided in wisdom to growth and achievement far beyond its natural ability. Praise God, He has gifted some people to serve the body of Christ in such a wonderful way.

In this verse, Paul also said, "He who gives, with liberality." The word translated "gives" is "metadidomi" and means "to share" or "to bestow." It means more than parting with funds that God has placed in one's care. It involves a special attitude in giving, "to share." Giving can establish levels of value among people. The giver may seem to be higher and the receiver may seem to be lower. Choosing this word, Paul described both the gift and the attitude. It is sharing, on an equal level, that which God entrusts this member of the body to provide. There are those in the body whose special gift is to provide necessary funding for vital tasks in carrying out our mandate to "go into all the world." God entrusts these body members with that which is necessary to fund the accomplishing of His mission in the world. These parts of the body are scrupulously careful with everything God entrusts to their care. They are, in general, frugal in their personal lives and extremely alert to the wisest use of what God has entrusted. Paul said these people should carry out their mission on behalf of the whole body with "generosity." We tend to think of "generosity" as describing a willingness to give largely. It is much more than that. It is defined in the word "aplots". Interestingly, it means "to be sincere, to be pure in the motive behind our action." It is more our attitude in giving than in the amount of our giving. God has blessed some members of the body with both the means as well as the beautiful attitude to enable His work. Frankly, God has designed the gifts in the body of Christ that the whole missionary effort is sustained largely by the "liberality" of those who have been entrusted with the gift of giving.

Again, in verse eight, Paul said, "He who leads, with diligence." The word describing "leads" is "proistaemi" and means "to appoint with authority." It means "to go before," or "guide." It comes from the management of sheep. There is some discussion about the management of sheep. I know a person who has driven sheep. I have never led nor driven sheep. My observation in Israel was always the same. You can drive cattle and goats, but you must lead sheep. Driving sheep is like herding squirrels; it does not work very well. God has gifted certain members of the body to envision where and how God would have the body move and serve. God also has gifted these people with the ability to inspire confidence in the minds of the rest of the body so that they will follow this person's direction.

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Paul also said, in this verse, "he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." The word translated "mercy" is "eleon" and means "to have compassion on those in distress." It is "to show saving mercy toward those in dire circumstances, to assure the struggling ones, in visible ways, that you care enough about their distress to act in benevolence." Paul said they should do this with "cheerfulness." "Ilarotaes" means "cheerfulness," but it also conveys the impression of cheerfulness without grudging.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. I Corinthians 12:12

In the previous paragraph, I Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul deals with the diversity of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit generously gives a diversity of ministries, but there is just one Lord of all. There is a wide diversity of workings, but the same God who works all things in all of them. Every believer receives some manifestation of the Spirit for the profit of the whole body of Christ.

As you observe this paragraph, it is clear that Paul has placed a very strong emphasis on the fact that there is only one Holy Spirit despite the fact that He provides a wide variety of gifts to the members of the body of Christ. Paul points out that the Holy Spirit gives a word of wisdom to some believers. To others, a word of knowledge, and to another the word of faith. He also indicated that the Spirit gave the gifts of healing to some; to still others the working of miracles. The Spirit also gave the gift of prophecy to some and to others the discerning of spirits. The Holy Spirit also gave different kinds of tongues that necessitated the gift of interpretation of tongues.

Each of these gifts is essential in the body and it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to give these gifts to appropriate recipients within the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is at work equipping each part of the body of Christ for its avenue of the ministry and the fellowship of the body. It is the Holy Spirit's choice, not ours, as to how we participate in the life and ministry of the church. The inference is that if the Holy Spirit is not involved in the dispensing of the gifts, then the body would have no gifts.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:13

In this passage, Paul stressed the activity of the Holy Spirit in the development and functioning of the church as the body of Christ. Without the Holy Spirit's ministry, the body of Christ does not function. There are no levels of importance or significance whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free. The Holy Spirit blends the ministry of believers together in the body of Christ. We all come, in some manner, to this relationship of being in the body of Christ.

Paul used two images to describe our participation in this body:

A. BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY.

When speaking of baptism, we need to be aware of some first century understanding of baptism. In Judaism and first century Christianity, baptism had ceremonial significance. It did not take away the sin. It rather symbolized the fact that the sins had already been taken away. Their baptism was an indication that these people are children of God. Whatever national or cultural background we may represent, we are all part of one body of Christ.

B. DRINK OF ONE SPIRIT

Whether slave or free, Jew or Gentile, we all relate to the one Holy Spirit who guides and enables each one to carry out their function within the body of Christ. Paul used the image of "drink of one Spirit". It is a way to describe the way the Holy Spirit permeates every facet of our being. This again is shared among the whole body of Christ, no matter what the ethnic background may be.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22-23

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In this paragraph, Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul focused attention on the greatness of Christ. This picture culminates in two depictions of Christ's greatness – The Father put all things under his feet and The Father gave Jesus as Head over all things to the church.

This speaks of ultimate control. The human body is the servant of the head. The mind controls every detail of everything done within the body. In the same manner, the church is the servant of Christ, its head.

As the head of the church, Christ minutely controls every movement and function of the body. Indeed, the body exists to carry out the wishes of the head. In the human body, the head controls the heart and the muscular activity of the entire body. The head also controls the production of body chemicals that maintain the bodies' stability. The church, Christ's body, is the fullness of Christ, the one who fills all in all.

And might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. Ephesians 2:16

The alienation between Gentiles and Jews was notorious. Even in the church, this formidable alienation reared its ugly head. The first general council of the church dealt with this very divisive issue. They were unable to solve the dilemma, so James made a decision on behalf of the church. In this paragraph, Paul pleads the need for unity in the church, a sense of oneness that supersedes all other loyalties. It is the blood of Christ that changes the identity from "Jew" to "saint" and from "Gentile" to "saint." Christ thus brought the two groups into one body, the church, and in so doing ended the divisive alienation. The oneness in the church, Christ's body, is made possible by His self-sacrifice. Observe how carefully Paul spoke. Christ reconciled the two to God rather than to each other. There was no way to reconcile them to each other. It is only in each one being reconciled to God that they can have any restoration to each other.

To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel Ephesians 3:6

More thoroughly in Ephesians than elsewhere, Paul described what it means for there to be unity between Jews and Gentiles. He does this through three specific references. Observe that Paul attached the word "fellow" to each description. It is very clear that Paul intentionally wrote this in such a way to dramatize the relationship of which he wrote. He used three descriptions of the Gentiles in relationship to Jews in the body of Christ. Paul formed each description in the same way. He added the word "sun," which means "with," to the description he was making. Look at each of these descriptions

a. The Gentiles are "FELLOW HEIRS"

The word translated "fellow heirs" is "sugklaeronoma". The caption "fellow heirs" identifies brothers whether natural or adopted. These are people who share an inheritance. We tend to focus on the inheritance element in this designation. Another ingredient was at least as important, if not more so. Brothers were responsible to protect and defend each other, even at the cost of their lives. They are those who share in both the blessings and responsibilities of the family. They have been molded in character by the father of the family. God used this intimate relationship to bring unity where there had been only alienation.

b. The Gentiles are "FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE BODY"

The word translated "fellow members" is "sussoma". Again, this is a compound word made up as follows: The word "sun" means "with." The word "soma" means "body" or "member." The word Paul used literally means "body with" or "joint members." Outside the intimate relationship of being in Christ, Jews and Gentiles were hostile enemies. Inside the body of Christ, they are not only in unity, the two become indistinguishable. It is as though there are not two groups.

c. The Gentiles are "FELLOW PARTAKERS"

The word translated "fellow partakers" is "summetoxa". Yet, again, this is a compound word made up as follows: Again, the word "sun" means "with." The word "metozos" means "partner" or "associate."

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This is one more way to stress the family aspect of the body of Christ. These people, who would have otherwise been enemies, SHARE in the promise in Christ as though they were literal family. Though Jews and Gentiles are quite different in a number of ways, their sharing in the promise in Christ Jesus is as though there was only one group.

The fact that Paul used an identical form in each of these three references accomplishes at least two things:

1. It certainly adds strong emphasis to his statement.
2. It also highlights one of the important pieces of information about the body of Christ – within this body, all other identities pale to insignificance.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling... Ephesians 4:4
In this chapter, as in much of Ephesians, the dominant theme is oneness, unity. In this paragraph, Ephesians 4:4-7, Paul used the word "one" at least seven times. He spoke of:

- a. One body
- b. One Spirit
- c. One hope of your calling
- d. One Lord
- e. One faith
- f. One baptism
- g. One God and Father of all

You get the impression that Paul was groping for every possible expression of unity he could find. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the body of Christ is its unity. It recognizes no categories that would divide the body. If one is in the body and participating as part of the body, then all barriers and dividing walls must be broken down. The relationship we share with each other in the body must be exactly the same as the relationship we share with Jesus Christ, the head of the body – no boundaries.

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16

The body of Christ is a place of growth. This growth is very directional - "in all aspects into Him." This is an intimate relationship with Christ. It expresses itself in our becoming increasingly like our Lord. Christ enables all of the parts of the body to cooperate and work together just as the human body does. JUST AS each part of the human body is strengthened and increasingly held together by the contribution of every joint and every part, SO each part of the body of Christ contributes to the growth of the body.

We need to be especially aware of Paul's first statement in this verse, "But speaking the truth in love." This is crucial. There are some in the body of Christ who have learned to speak the truth, but it is not spoken in love. They are masterful in speaking the truth in such a way that a sharp sword could not do more damage and devastation. We began our study by saying that each part of the body does that which the Spirit gives it to do in such a way that the body is improved and strengthened by its participation. That can only be true as we learn to speak the truth in love. Speaking the truth in love, as a lifestyle, enables the body of Christ to grow and be strengthened by that which each part contributes to its completeness. In these things the growth takes place and the body is being built up IN LOVE.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. Ephesians 5:29-30

THE BODY OF CHRIST

In several places, Paul intermingles images of the believers as the church and as the body of Christ. That is what is done in these verses. In verse 29, Paul describes the relation of the person with his/her body as one of love and appreciation. In our personal and corporate intimate relationship with Christ, He views us with intense love and appreciation. Paul emphasized the way a person nourishes and cherishes his own body. Researchers tell us that in times of threatening crisis, human beings will make survival their single priority. As the dangers diminish, we shift our priority from survival to increasing the quality of life. In developed countries, we have learned that exercise and careful nutritional decisions will prolong life and increase its quality. We may not be excited about the regimen, but in increasing numbers we are committing ourselves to do whatever is necessary to sustain and improve our lives. Personally, and as God's church in the world, God is demonstrating an even greater affection for us in the way He guides us by His Spirit and protects us against every form of evil.

In verse 30, Paul clearly states that we are members of Christ's body. It is a way of saying, in the way a person takes intricate, delicate care of his/her body, SO Christ takes intimate, delicate care of everything that happens to His body, the church.

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. Colossians 1:18

Paul has described the exaltation of Christ. Beyond our most extreme imagination, we are privileged to share this intimate relationship with the eternal One; the One who not only brought creation into being, but also sustains all He brought into being. Jesus predates all creation. He is the head of the body, the church. Paul spoke of Jesus as, "the first born from the dead." It does not mean that Jesus was the first to be resurrected. We know that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead before the crucifixion. In that culture, the first-born was destined to be in control of the family. This was Paul's intent. Though Jesus was not the first to rise from the dead, He was in control of those who would be resurrected. Paul indicated that the picture of the accomplishments of Jesus was intended to highlight His greatness. It is with such an One that we share this personal intimate relationship and a corporate one as the body of Christ.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body which is the church in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Colossians 1:24

The church, the body of Christ, shares an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the head of the body. Paul carefully points out that this is not solely a relationship of generosity and blessing. As we share the intimacy of His presence, we also share in His suffering. We all have a part to play; an element to contribute to the ministry of the body and in some cases it will involve sharing His pain and rejection by those outside the body. In this verse, Paul sounds as though Jesus did not complete the necessary suffering. It is as though the regimen of suffering was interrupted by His untimely death. In every era since the time of Christ, there has been some level of persecution that believers have endured because of their faith. We have learned, during these difficult times, that our participation in His sufferings is as much a witness now as it was in the first century. Jesus warned us that this would be the case. We are invited to share Christ's life, but that must also include the privilege of participating in His sufferings as well.

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. Colossians 2:18-19

Paul carefully described the kind of opposition and attack the believers should anticipate from the enemy. These people, instructed by their visions and false teaching, will feel that they do justice and righteousness by opposing the gospel in our lives. Between verses 18 and 19, Paul drew a contrast between the pagan dependence upon visions and false teachings about angels on the one hand and the Colossian Christians remaining true to Christ, the head of the body on the other.

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Paul concluded verse 19 by describing how a human body holds together and grows. It is like saying, "JUST AS the head is the originating point for physical growth; enabling each part of the body to perform its function and thus facilitating increased strength, SO in the church, the head facilitates the work of each part of the body to enable increased strength and growth which ultimately comes from God.

This passage deals with the effect heresy has upon the life of the church. False teaching leads to separation from Christ. Contrarywise, proper teaching and understanding forms a vital ingredient in the life of the church.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Colossians 3:15-17

In Colossians 3:1-17, Paul draws a graphic contrast between the way they once lived and the life to which he is encouraging them in Christ. Paul's point was made with shocking clarity. Look at the picture he drew.

THEIR FORMER LIFE

Fornication – v.5
Impurity – v. 5
Passion – v. 5
Evil desire – v. 5
Greed-idolatry – v. 6
Anger – v.8
Wrath – v. 8
Malice – v. 8
Slander – v. 8
Abusive speech – v. 8
Dishonesty – v. 9

THEIR LIFE IN CHRIST

Chosen of God – v. 12
Holy – v. 12
Beloved – v. 12
Compassion – v. 12
Kindness – v. 12
Humility – v. 12
Gentleness – v. 12
Patience – v. 12
Love – v. 1`4
Peace in Christ – v. 15
Thankful – v. 15
Let the word of Christ dwell in you – v. 16
Let wisdom dwell in you – v. 16
Teach and admonish each other – v. 16
Rejoicing – v. 16
Singing unto God – v. 16
Do everything in the name of the Lord – v. 17

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When you look carefully at this table, you see a stark contrast as well as an excellent picture of the qualities that are essential in the body of Christ. These qualities are necessary because they are the essentials in the life of the head of the body, Jesus Christ. Look more closely at these qualities.

a. HOLY

The word so translated is "hagioi". It means "to separate from common condition and use." It is "to be dedicated." It is also used to describe a life that is pure and righteous. This quality is present in Christ, the head of the body, and is a requirement for the rest of the body. By some, this is thought to be a quality of perfection, flawlessness. That will not be true this side of heaven. Holy describes a life that is both cleansed and set apart for the service of God. It is increasingly pure and more like the life of Christ.

b. BELOVED

The word translated "beloved" is agapaemenoi". It means "to love, to value or esteem, to express a generous concern for someone." It is "to be faithful toward" or "to delight in." This is presented in the form of a passive participle. This is not something that body members do. It is rather, a relationship in which this is the way we are perceived by God.

c. COMPASSIONATE

"Splagxnon" is translated "compassionate" in verse 12. The word literally means "intestines". It was thought, by the Jews, that this part of the body was the center of kindly, compassionate tender affections. The body of Christ is to be identifiable by its expression of tender affection and compassion. This is because it is the character of Jesus, the head of the body.

d. KIND

The word "oiktirmos" is translated "kindness." This is not a description of a benevolent demeanor, but rather of concerned actions to relieve sorrow and want. Here again, it is what Jesus was like.

e. GENTLE

The word translated "gentle," in verse 12, is "chraestotaes". This word, like "oiktimos" has to do with kind, loving deportment. John 8:1-11 tells the story of the woman taken in adultery. Though this was a tragic event, Jesus treated her with a gentleness that was singularly surprising. It may sound as though kindness and gentleness are synonymous. They are not. Kindness is that concern to minister to those who suffer. Gentleness is the atmosphere in which kindness is offered. These two qualities always work in conjunction with each other. You will never see unkind gentleness. On the other hand, you will not encounter rude kindness. It would be a contradiction in terms.

f. HUMBLE

The word translated "humble" is "tapeinofrosune". It is the word used to describe the publican when he prayed, "Have mercy on me a sinner." It is a Christian virtue expressed in conjunction with the holiness of God and is closely linked to "agapae" love. This "agapae" love is love that has no prerequisites; it makes no demands; it does not require a response; it is an action, not a reaction. Humbleness would be considered the opposite of pride and selfishness. It is to view yourself as a servant to others in the body. It is a focus on our actions more than our disposition. It is to live for others within the body. There is a tendency to mistake humility for weakness. The opposite is true. Luke gives us a good example of this quality in the life of the Gentile Centurion. He said,

The Centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord do not trouble yourself further, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. For this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed." Luke 7:6, 7

g. MEEK

The word "prautaeta" means "to be gentle" or "meek." It is "a mildness of both manner and activity." It is extremely important as the attitude or atmosphere with which we might approach a fellow believer trapped

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in error. It is one of the gifts that expresses itself as forgiven sinners begin to grow in Christlikeness. It takes the place of indignation or defiance when we are mistreated. It appears that this is what one sees when God sent Jeremiah to speak to Jehoiakim, king of Judah. Jeremiah conveyed that difficult message and then said to the king,

But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your sight. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing. Jeremiah 26:14, 14

h. PATIENT

This is the translation of the word "makrothumia". This is not a picture of indolence or lack of action. It is in itself a strong action of control rather than lashing out at those who antagonize. It is one of the characteristics evident in God's dealings with us. It carries the atmosphere of being offered to the undeserving – a form of merciful grace.

i. BEARING WITH EACH OTHER

The word so translated is "anexomenoi". It is the ability to bear with inappropriate actions and relations both from the outside, pagan environment as well as within the body of Christ when fellow members are less than their best. It is the restraint of self, not the gritting of the teeth and holding one's breath, but the calculated ability to endure misuse in order to help another move to a higher expression of Christlike conduct.

j. FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

The word translated forgiving is "charidzomai". The emphasis is as much on the manner in which this favor is granted as on the forgiveness granted. It is what Paul pushed so desperately for Philemon to bestow upon Onesimus. He wanted the forgiveness to be offered, but the kind, gentle manner in which this undeserved favor was offered was yet more important. We are to live our lives following the example set for us in Christ. Our sins are separated from us "as far as the east is from the west." Nothing less is required of us when we are called upon to forgive others.

k. LOVING

The word is "agapae". This is love without boundaries or limits. It is a divine quality. It is the word almost always used to describe the love of God. There are no prerequisites and no necessary responses. It is to love, simply because you love.

l. BEING AT PEACE

In Colossians 3:15, the word "eirene" is translated "peace." This word was most often used to describe a sense of wellbeing. It is a quality of the heart, not related to the presence of favorable conditions. In good times or not so good, the New Testament encourages us to be at peace. It is to be in such harmony with God that our relationships with others are peaceful, no matter how they may act.

m. THANKFUL

The word is "eucharistoi". It is a "celebration of grace." It is a prayer of thanksgiving. It is a recognition that God is not only the source of our salvation, but also of every gift we have.

It stretches the mind beyond its ability to grasp to contemplate what it would be like to be a part of a fellowship in which all of these qualities were normal conduct. The fact is that this is the atmosphere, the normal way of thinking and acting that God longs to share with the church. It is what God is like. It is what we must increasingly be like if we would really share the intimate relationship with Christ and each other, of being the body of Christ.

IN REFLECTION

It is more than exciting to contemplate what it would be like to experience these relationships as the local expression of the body of Christ. The sense of unity and harmony is beyond human description. It is

THE BODY OF CHRIST

fascinating to contemplate what would happen if every part of the body of Christ was eager to contribute its own expertise to that part of the body that was in desperate need of it.

No two human bodies are exactly alike. The attributes of all the parts within a human body, however, match. The DNA from any part of a human body is the same as that of any other part. In the body of Christ, you see the same thing. Each member of the body of Christ must become increasingly like Him if we are to be, in fact, members of His body.

We must also keep in mind the sobering thought that our harmonious functioning as the body will seriously heighten the stark contrast in relationships between the body and the world around us. That which binds us together within the body is also the source of that which separates us from that world.

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

During the three and one half years of His ministry, Jesus taught many truths that were difficult to understand. Invariably, he would use one of two different means to convey the truth in a way His hearers could understand. He might tell them a story such as the prodigal son. Again, He might use something they understood very well to illustrate a truth they did not understand at all. Paul learned well from the way Jesus taught. The intimacy between the believer and his God was one of those truths that was difficult to comprehend. Jesus, Peter, John and Paul all used "the bride of Christ" as a way to illustrate this great truth.

Most everyone knew something about a wedding. Weddings were frequent and family was always invited. They would know, for instance, that the bride would no longer belong to her parents' family. She would now be a part of her husband's family for the rest of her life. Everyone expected the bride to carry out her responsibility to bear children in order to preserve her husband's name and to provide for the two of them when they grew old. They thought of the husband as the head of the wife. In this respect, the biblical statements were not out of step with the culture of that day. In all times and in all issues, the husband was to be obeyed.

Then, as now, in that culture, the wife would be prepared to endure great personal sacrifice for the benefit of her husband. An example of this can be seen when Abraham told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister. You know that Isaac did exactly the same thing. In that culture, the bride belonged to her husband. She was his personal property. She knew that her place in life was to serve and please him.

In one sense, women did not count in that culture. There are not a lot of places in the Bible where the names of the wives are given. In the feeding of the 5,000, they counted the men and then added, "plus women and children." It certainly does not seem so to us, but in their thinking, the wives were cherished. Proverbs chapter 31 is a beautiful example of this understanding. Then, as now, extreme efforts were made to protect their wives. In the desert today, no one may speak to a woman who is not his wife or even approach her on pain of death. These and probably many other things flooded the minds of those who listened to Jesus as he talked about a bride and groom. To be sure, there were some images of the wife that were anything but what the Scriptures taught about the servants of God.

And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and they will fast. Matthew 9:15

This is a picture that everyone who heard Jesus had observed more than once. The groom, in this case, Jesus, was the source of great joy and excitement. When the bridegroom came, no one would ever think of being sad. People in sorrow or mourning would rejoice at the presence of the groom. It did not mean that their sorrow had melted away. It meant that the presence of the groom was cause for joy even for those who were sorrowing.

And said, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Matthew 19:5

Jesus was being accosted by the Pharisees concerning whether or not a man might divorce his wife. Jesus was quoting from Genesis 2:24. In creation, both male and female came into being at the same time. Only with human beings was that not the case. The woman was, in fact, part of her husband's body. They were in reality one flesh. What happened to one was happening to them both. Leaving father and mother described a shift in allegiance and responsibility. At this point, the wife becomes his central responsibility. As the bride of Christ, we see some parallels here.

1. Jesus said, "I am in you and you are in me."
2. He is part of everything in our lives.

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3. Jesus has taken responsibility for our lives.
4. He is the one who watches over our lives.
5. Jesus said, "What you have done unto one of the least of these my brethren you have done unto me."

Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Matthew 25:1

In the marriage experience, in that culture, the groom would come and take the bride to his home. This is exactly what Jesus has promised to do with the church, the bride of Christ.

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. And so this joy of mine has been made full. John 3:29

Jesus was saying that the bride belongs to the bridegroom. In the same manner, we belong to our bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an atmosphere of great joy just to be in His presence. That, too, is true of Christ for us.

In my father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also. John 14:2, 3

Everyone who heard Jesus speak these words had seen this lived out in their family and community. When there was a wedding, the father of the groom would add a room to the family tent or house for the groom and his intended. When everything was ready, the groom's father would announce the wedding. The groom would go and bring the bride to his father's house. It was an illustration of the fact that they would be together for the rest of their lives. Jesus was giving some important information in this message. It is clear that we are the bride. Jesus has prepared a place for us in heaven. He will come and receive us unto Himself. He will dwell with us and we with Him throughout eternity.

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Ephesians 5:22

The word translated "subject" is "hupotasso" which is a compound word. It is made up as follows: "Hupo" means "under." "Tasso" means "to arrange." It is a military term. It means to rank under the authority of a designated officer. It does not mean that one is more important than the other. It does mean that at this juncture the designated officer gives direction to the battle. The word is used in the book of Hebrews where the author wrote,

Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, he left nothing that is not subject to Him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. Hebrews 2:8

God the Father placed everything under the control of the Son. The author made careful statements to indicate that nothing was left out of the control of the Son. The text we are considering literally says, "Wives place yourselves under the care of the husband in the way you placed yourself under the control of the Lord." We view ourselves under the control of the Lord in every detail of our lives. We need to ask ourselves what their relationship to the Lord really was. There should be a sincere, intense love of the husband by the wife. To speak of believers as the bride of Christ is to say that they should have an intense, sincere love of Jesus. In a woman's relationship to her husband, there should be an aggressive participation in his life. Being the bride of Christ will involve no less of our involvement in His life. The believers understood the wife's place to be prepared to sacrifice greatly for the sake of her husband. As the bride of Christ, we can see ourselves no less prepared to sacrifice on His behalf.

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The bride is to love her husband more than all else in the world. In the same way, the bride of Christ is to love Him as expressed in obedience, more than all else in the world.

The bride is to see herself under the guiding care of her husband. We, as the bride of Christ, must see ourselves as totally at His disposal to guide in the conduct of the Father's will.

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, He Himself being the savior of the body. Ephesians 5:23

The word translated "head" is "kephale" and literally describes the "human head." Figuratively, it describes "authority" or "direction." In a very specific way, God has ordained that the husband should take authority over the wife in the family. The way this sentence is written, Paul had something specific in mind when he made it. He is not talking about the kind of control a military officer holds over the men under his command. Observe that he immediately mentions two things when he stated that the husband is the head of the wife. He drew a comparison with the authority Christ has over the church. He, then, mentions that Christ is the savior of the body. The Lord guides the church and gives her gentle direction. The Lord gives direction to the church, in order to seek the best interest of the church rather than to impose His will upon the church. The word translated "savior" is "soter" and was used to describe "one who saves, one who provides salvation." It describes one who is the deliverer from sin. It is one who is a preserver. In this particular verse, the word describes one who sustains and preserves. This, in fact, is what Paul was talking about. The Lord takes authority over the church in order to sustain and preserve it, rather than to control its every action. The husband is to take authority over the wife in order to sustain her and preserve her against everything that would do her harm. As the bride of Christ, the church is keenly aware of the fact that He does lead and guide us in order to sustain us in difficult times and preserve us when any danger threatens our existence.

But the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Ephesians 5:24

Again, Paul used the word "hupotasso" to suggest the idea of "being subject" as he did in verse 22. As previously indicated, the word is a military term that means to place oneself under authority. Again, it does not mean that the husband is better or more important than the wife. It simply means that the husband has been designated as the one who gives direction to the way the family faces the struggles of life. Paul adds great emphasis as he used this illustration a second time to describe our relationship to the Lord. In this relationship, between Christ and the church, the church completely trusts itself to the direction of Christ. In this relationship, Christ, like a loving husband, gently gives direction to the family, so Christ carefully directs our lives and purposes to our benefit and not as a way to suppress our wills.

Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Ephesians 5:25

When a husband is eager to live sacrificially to protect and provide for his wife, he is demonstrating the kind of love Christ has for the church. The word translated "love" is "agapae" a form of love that has no limits. It is love that does not demand a response. He will love us whether or not we obey Him. He will love us just because we are. His love grows out of His concern for our needs rather than to love for self-benefit. Notice that again, Paul used the parallel and ends it with the idea that such love is sacrificial to the point of death on behalf of the beloved. In the intimate relationship between Christ and the church, the whole relationship grows out of His intense desire to save us from sin and from that which would destroy us.

That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. Ephesians 5:26

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The word translated "sanctify" is "hagiadso". Normally this word has one of two meanings: It means "to set apart for God and for His use." It also means "to purify." The rest of the sentence speaks of cleansing by washing. That being the case, this use of the word needs to stress the idea of setting apart for oneself. This is exactly what a husband does when he takes a wife. He sets her apart from all others. She is available to none other than him. The Lord has chosen us in love as a husband lovingly sets his wife apart for his own fellowship. Observe that this sanctifying only takes place after the Lord cleanses the bride by the washing of the word. We should keep in mind that if there is no cleansing, no purifying, then we need to consider whether or not we are, indeed, a part of His bride, the church. Again, we are not prepared to be cleansed unless we have been thoroughly immersed in the word of God.

That he might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. Ephesians 5:27

The groom wants to be totally appreciative of his bride. He wants her beauty and grace to be appreciated by everyone. The groom, Christ, wants everything about His bride to be lovely, perfect. Paul used a contrast to emphasize his point. Notice his use of the word "but." First he mentioned what he does not mean – no spot or wrinkle. These are physical conditions. At this point he mentions what he does mean – she should be holy.

"That she should be holy" The word translated "holy" is "hagia" and means "to be separated, to be set apart." It also means "to be free from all that would pollute." In this instance, the sentence structure indicates that Paul's intent is the idea of being set apart for God as the priests were set apart for divine service and the sacrificial animals could be used for nothing else.

"That she should be blameless" The word translated "blameless" is "amomos" and means "to be without blame or flaw of any kind." This harks back to the choosing of the sacrificial animal. There were several criteria by which the Jew could determine whether an animal qualified to be a sacrifice for their sins. It is to be blameless in character and conduct. The Lord chooses His bride the church, "to be without blame, to be without character flaw or weakness." The Lord's desire for His bride is that she should be pure in character, act and word. Only then can He be as proud of her presence as He wishes to be.

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. Ephesians 5:28

Again, the word translated "love" is "agapae" which is "love without reservation or condition." It is the word that describes the love of God. It is to love just because the person is, not because she does pleasing things. The husband's love of the bride as he loves himself is not inordinate pride. It is the ultimate self-giving affection that describes the love of God throughout the Scriptures. This love for the wife is an expression of his loving care for himself. In the same way, Christ has a love for His bride, the church, which is as strong as His care for Himself.

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church. Ephesians 5:29

In this verse, Paul described the way a man should love his wife. Paul continued his description by identifying it as the way Christ loves the church. Every mentally sound human being takes great care of his/her own life. This is the way Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. There is no need of the church that He will allow to go unmet.

Because we are members of His body. Ephesians 5:30

The "body of Christ" is another way Paul describes the relationship of the church to the Lord. In this instance, however, he has used it as a way to describe the church as the bride of Christ. We, the church, are members of Christ's body in the same way that He is "in the Father." There are several implications to this statement. As members of His body, whatever happens to us has a very direct effect upon Him.

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Conversely, anything that happens to Him and His purposes directly affects us in the same way as it affects Him. The idols are thought to be distant and unaffected by the trauma of the lives of those who worship them. Just the opposite is true with Jesus.

For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. Ephesians 5:31

This is Paul's attempt to describe the fact that the church, as the bride of Christ, is the major concern in the life of the groom, Jesus Christ. "The two shall become one flesh." As the bride, we become indiscernible from the groom. Our lives are inseparable. Our interests have a single focus. Jesus has the single focus – the care and nurture of His bride, the church.

Nevertheless, let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband. Ephesians 5:33

As stated in this verse, Paul was talking about Christ and the church, but it also was intended to describe the care and relationship between a husband and wife. One of the descriptives he used was that the wife "respect" her husband. The word translated "respect" is "fobos" which is usually translated "fear." It originally carried the idea of fleeing from danger. It later came to be used as a way to describe reverential fear. This describes the need, in the life of the church, that controls the motive for every choice one must make. It identifies great care lest we bring displeasure to our loving Lord. This reverence banishes any dread that the person might have of the Lord, as we had before our sins were forgiven. It enables us to feel welcomed in His presence.

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. I Peter 3:7

Peter also had some instructions for the church concerning this relationship with Christ. In this verse, Peter gives us a glimpse into the thinking of the Lord concerning the church. He, too, used the image of the husband and the wife to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church.

A loving husband is considerate of his wife. He does not expect her to be able to do all the things that he does. He values her for who she is and what she is intended to be able to do. He does not expect more than that from her. It is an attitude of consideration. Notice that Peter did not say that she is a weaker vessel. He said that the husband should understand her and treat her as if she were a weaker vessel.

Peter also instructed the husband to "grant her honor." We need to look carefully at these words. The word translated "grant" is "aponemo" and means "to bestow upon." The word was originally used to describe the dispersing of food to animals. It later came to describe the bestowing upon another person. The word translated "honor" is "timae" and means "to bestow the highest esteem." It is to place the highest value upon something or someone. It is to view something as precious. This is how the husband is intended to view his wife. This is the way Christ views the church. We know that He has placed the highest value upon us. He holds us in highest honor. We are precious in His sight.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:2

John also used the image of the bride and groom as an illustration. From his use of this image, we can gain an insight into his understanding of the relationship of the church to Christ. He said, "as a bride adorned for her husband." He has told us that the bride takes great care for her appearance on the wedding day in an effort to please her husband. The groom is the center of all her efforts and considerations. This is exactly what our attitude toward our relationship to Christ should be.

Where Are You ?!

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Revelation 21:9

John spoke of the church as "the wife of the Lamb." That is our place. Everything that the culture of that day understood about a bride and groom is involved in John's statement about the church as "the bride of the Lamb." We are a part of His family. All our old ties and allegiances are past and forgotten. We are totally absorbed in His life. He is the focal point of all that we think and do.

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. Revelation 22:17

In the closing chapter of Revelation, John describes the Spirit and the bride – the church – imploring the Lord to come as he had promised to do. There is a definite relationship between the church and the Spirit. He is our guide. He knows the mind of Christ on our behalf and directs our thinking to best serve the purposes of the groom, Jesus Christ.

IN REFLECTION

When the Scriptures speak of the church as the "bride of Christ," it has chosen the most intimate human experience as a way to provide insight into the relationship God has created. In this study, we have selected the passages that shed light on what it means to be the bride of Christ. If you page back through the study, you will discover there are as many insights into the life of the groom (Christ) as there are concerning the bride (the church.) We cannot grasp what the Scriptures say about this relationship unless we carefully consider both the bride and the groom.

Christ is the head, the guide of the church. As the bride finds her joy in the presence of her husband, Christ is the source of the joy of the church. The groom accepts total responsibility for the life of his bride and she relishes that comfortable position. The groom took his bride to his home forever. That, of course, is our ultimate hope. The most important thing in the mind of the groom is to have his bride always at his side. The groom is proud of his wife. He presents her to himself before everyone. He is thrilled by the fact she is holy and blameless. He loves her as he loves himself. In so doing, he nourishes and cherishes her. The groom treats his bride with great respect. Though she is strong, he honors her as though she were weaker and so gives deference and rapt attention to her every need.

IT'S FAMILY

The Scriptures use family images to help us understand intimate relationships. The Bible uses the terms "father," "Son" and "Brother" in this manner. Our western culture does not grasp this very well. Unfortunately, all too often the idea of "father" has come to mean paternity and little more. There are some who view the use of words like "father," "Son" and "Brother" as expressions of sexism. That is not what the authors had in mind. These identifiers were used to describe the way people in the family related to each other.

FATHER

The father in the family was considered responsible for bringing a child into the world. This understanding resulted in the father being held in high esteem and respect. In the 10 commandments, "honor thy father and thy mother" sets the tone for the way parents are viewed.

The father of the family was the provider for the needs of every person within that family. When Jacob saw that the famine in Israel made it impossible to feed his family, he instructed his sons to go to Egypt to buy food. That was his responsibility.

In every family, the father was responsible to establish and maintain the character of that family. You may remember that in Genesis 37, Jacob sent Joseph to check up on his brothers and the condition of the flock. Joseph brought his father an accurate report of just how disobedient the other brothers were. It is not surprising that Jacob chose Joseph, his eleventh son, to be his heir. The father of the family set the spiritual pace of everyone in his family.

The father of a family was, in effect, the master of the household. He gave directions to each member concerning their work assignment. He arranged for their wedding without consultation. In the story of what we call The Prodigal Son, the older son said, "...I have never disobeyed a command of yours." Luke 15:29. In the Jewish family, this was the responsibility of the father.

They did not have schools as such. The father was the teacher of the family, both spiritually and culturally. You may remember that in Acts 16:33 Luke tells us, "the jailer was baptized and all his ..." Again, Eli was chastised because his sons did evil in their practice of the priesthood and he did nothing about it. This is because it is the father's position in the family to set the character and spiritual direction for the family. In the Jewish family, father was the one responsible for the protection of the family. When Abraham's brother died, Lot was taken into Abraham's family. Eventually, Lot was captured by a pagan king. Abraham risked his entire family as well as his neighbors to defeat the king and rescue Lot. That was a father's responsibility.

When the Scriptures speak of God as "Father" these factors are what the author is talking about. God is the one who created us and provides for our every need. He is the one after whose character every child of His must fashion his actions and mold his character. This is what is behind the command "Be ye holy because I am holy." God the Father guides and directs every action and purpose for every day of our lives. His ways are not our ways. He is the one who by His Spirit teaches us to be what Paul described as "Imitators of God." Job is a wonderful illustration of how completely God is our protector. When someone speaks of God as "Father," this is what they had in mind.

SON

In a way that seems strange to us, sons were prized more than daughters. Their reasoning was simple. There were no national provisions for old age. Western countries have arrangements for people in their old age. Israel had nothing like this. Their daughters would be married to men from other families and would have no further contact with their birth family. The sons provided for the care and support of their parents in their old age. Every couple hoped that they would have several sons.

The idea of being a "son" is a specific relationship with the father. They were commanded to honor their father. Jesus had something rather strong to say about a son who told his parents that what he might have been able to give to support them as given to God.

Where Are You ?!

The son must be teachable. Paul in showing the difference between a son and a servant in a family focused intently on the need of the son to be taught by his father or a servant whom the father assigned to teach the son.

First and foremost, a son must be obedient in every respect. He must do exactly what his father tells him to do. The father knows exactly what has to be done in order to fully provide for every need of the family. The son must be as fully committed to his father's desire for the family as the father is himself. This is exactly what Jesus dealt with when he claimed that He spoke what He heard the Father saying. He claimed to be doing only the will of His father. Though all power was placed in Jesus, still He refused to do anything except the will of His Father. In the garden prayer, clearly what He longed for and what the Father required were quite different, still he said, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done."

Every young man has some idea of the kind of person he seeks for a wife. Still, the father would make that choice without consultation with his son or any other member of the family.

When Lot was taken captive, every male member of Abraham's family became part of the rescue team. That is part of what is involved in being a "son."

It is required of every son that he emulate the character of his father. If you look at the character qualities of the Father which are described in the Old Testament, you will see them again in the life of Jesus. It is not surprising that Jesus would say, "I and the Father are one."

When the Scriptures speak of Jesus as "Son"; when the New Testament speaks of the fact that the redeemed are "sons of God," there is a long list of characteristics and requirements that are wrapped up in that identification. When the first century Christians used the "Ichthus" sign to identify each other, the brief designation, "Son of God" said volumes about the loving intensity of their mutual commitment.

BROTHER

In the modern church, if a person calls another person "Brother," it is understood that this is a way to identify a fellow believer. It was much more than that for the people in the early church. It was a way to indicate that this person was considered family with all the appropriate responsibilities and privileges.

In the first century family system, each person was mutual support for every other person in that particular family. If one suffered loss, it was loss for the entire clan and every person became part of the necessary effort to rebuild.

If one member of the family suffered financial reversals and could not pay his debt, it was the responsibility of his brothers to pay the debt and release him from debtor's prison – no chapter 11 or 13.

Should a brother be attacked, every brother must join in the defense of the beleaguered brother. Every brother would work vigorously at the securing of family support. At the death of the father, each brother would receive an equal inheritance. The heir, however, would receive a double portion and take the position and power formerly carried out by the father.

Each son/brother in the family was required to emulate the character and moral direction of the father. They were responsible to protect their common reputation by maintaining the moral character established by the father. Unlike our system where a brother is just a person who has the same two parents we have, there were specific responsibilities and privileges which went with the designation. When Paul emphasized a point in his epistles and then immediately referred to them as "brethren," he was saying this is a person for whom he would give his life; one for whom he would pay his debt and defend him with everything I am and have.

When the Scriptures speak of Jesus as our "older brother" it is not a meaningless gesture. It is rather a total commitment of the self. In Christ, you are family to me, one for whom I would risk everything. In the first century prison system, if a prisoner was to be fed, the family must be the one providing that food. If other believers brought food to a Christian brother, they would be exposed as also Christians and risked incarceration as well. The believers visited their brothers in prison risking everything to be family to a "brother," a fellow servant of Christ.

IN REFLECTION

IT'S FAMILY

The Scriptures basically identify three terms to point out the benefits and responsibilities of being "family" – "Father," "Son" and "Brother." The central family relationship is love. This love is expressed in the responsibilities which are the benefits for the other family members.

ADOPTION

The Greek word "houiothesia" means "to place as a son," This is a compound word. "Huios" literally means "child," specifically, "son." "To kneel down" is the literal word and describes the way a son showed respect to his father. Tithemi" means "to place." This concept had meaning beyond the definition of the words. The adoption into a family had great significance for the adopted person. He would be an equal recipient of the inheritance of the family. He would be trained by the father. He would be protected by the father and family like any other brother. He would be responsible to obey the father as any other son. He would be taught to follow the example of the father. The father would arrange his marriage for him. The father would give him the tent, animals and land to start his own family. He would be molded to express the lifestyle of the father. He would be loved by the father as any other son. Adoption affects the way the adopted person sees him/herself. It is to see oneself as a part of the natural family in exactly the same way that a natural-born son would view himself. It is the opposite of the self-image of the one who views himself as purchased and added to the family property. It involves a sense of belonging, a sense of roots.

A very prominent American singer and his wife adopted an orphan girl. She had no family. She was not a part of his family until she was adopted. Many years later, she talked on television about the family. She could not have felt more a natural part of this singer's family if she had been born as their daughter.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. Romans 8:14

This describes a way of life – "one being led." A characteristic of our adoption is that we are led by the Holy Spirit. The inference is that the characteristic of adoption is that we are not controlled by the spirit of bondage.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" Romans 8:15

We have received a spirit of adoption, a sense of being brought into the Family as a son, with all the freedom and responsibility that this suggests. Paul was very emphatic in this verse. He wanted to use the word "father," but he wanted to emphasize it. He used both the Greek word "pater" and the Hebrew word "abba" both of which mean "daddy." The Greek word "pater" means male parent. It identifies paternity as clearly as a study of D.N.A. does today. It sets boundaries for character. You may remember that Jacob was deeply disturbed when his sons killed the men from the people of the man who molested their sister. Jacob's distress was that it had set a whole people against his family and the character boundaries they had set for themselves. No one is surprised when a drunk's son turns out to be as personally out of control as his father. Most everyone is aghast when the son of a man known for his impeccable character goes wrong. Fatherhood has a definite molding effect upon the character and values of the children born to him. This was part of being adopted into a family.

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. Romans 8:23

Paul, in this instance, describes what adoption is. For the adopted, as for the rest of God's family, there will be times of groaning. This adoption involves having the first-fruits of the Spirit. The "first-fruits" identifies the best of the harvest that was to be given to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The "first fruits of the Spirit" describes that great work of the Holy Spirit in transforming our personality and character into greater Christlikeness. Paul here uses the idea of adoption, of being brought into God's family, as a way to speak of our eventual entrance into God's eternal presence. Adoption here involves the redemption of the body.

who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises... Romans 9:4

Where Are You ?!

Paul used the idea of "adoption" for a specific purpose. Originally, Israel was not the people, the children of God. God took Israel to be His children as though they were natural-born. God adopted Israel for no deserving reason, God chose to make Israel His family just as God made mankind in His image in the creation story. In this passage, Paul identified six special blessings God had given to the Israelites. One of these was "the adoption as sons." Paul classified this adoption along with the giving of the Law and the services of the temple. It is on a par with the promises of God which He cannot change.

This suggests just how great this adoption was considered to be in Israel, especially being adopted into God's family. This adoption is a personal possession; a personal quality of character. Notice, Paul said, "to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory..." In Scripture, things tend to be listed in the order of their importance, though not exclusively. This New Testament "adoption" is as meaningful to Israel as the "glory of God" revealed in the Old Testament picture of God, in the pillar of smoke, hovering above the tabernacle giving guidance to all Israel as a father guides his son. This adoption opens to us a discovery of the glory of God as revealed both in the cloud around the tabernacle as well as the presence of Jesus Christ.

In order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Galatians 4:5

This adoption is made possible by God sending His son to redeem us. Being under the Law was not a limitation when God sent His Son to redeem fallen mankind.

Being under the Law does not enable a person to be adopted into the family of God. Redemption leads to ultimate adoption. Being brought into the family is a divine action, not a human one. One of the purposes of our redemption is that we might receive adoption as sons. God certainly wants us to avoid the punishment of hell. But He wants more than that. We are redeemed in order that He might bring us into His family.

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. Galatians 4:7

Here Paul used the image of a son in a family in contrast to a servant in the family. He mentioned some similarities and some differences. It looks like this:

THE DIFFERENCES

THE SON

He has a positive future expectation. He will one day have and control everything and everyone in the family

He is being prepared to be the master in the house. He is being served, not used.

THE SERVANT

He has a negative future expectation. He will always be a slave.

He is being used. There is no future expectation beyond this.

THE SIMILARITIES

THE SON

He is controlled by the father of the family.

THE SERVANT

He is controlled by the father of the family.

In verse 4, Paul points out that in our sinful state we were like the bondservant, but God made a surprise move. In Jesus Christ, God entered human form and experience in order to adopt the slave as a son. In verses six and seven, Paul described the results of this adoption. Observe that this was accomplished through the Holy Spirit. The process takes two forms in the adopted sons:

The Spirit cries "Abba Father" – "Daddy, Daddy." This is both the Greek and Hebrew word for Father. It represents both Jews and Gentiles. It is the picture, the emblem of belonging. It is the guarantee that we are given the right to appeal to God for our needs and expect a positive response the same as a child expects his father to provide whatever his need may be.

ADOPTION

The Spirit clarifies the shadowed truth that in our adoption, we have moved from being a servant to being an heir. There are volumes involved in this discovery that we belong.

We share the family reputation. People treated Lot in the same way that they would treat Abraham. This is clear in the fact that scores of men risked their lives and fortunes to go with Abraham to bring Lot back.

We take on family identity. Lot was expected to conduct himself in the way that Abraham's immediate family would conduct themselves. People would expect the adopted son to conduct himself in harmony with the values of his new family. In our case, God expects our lifestyle to reflect His own. When this relationship between Abraham and Lot broke down, Abraham and Lot separated. Lot was no longer looked upon as Abraham's son.

We are safe. In that culture, the family unit was the basic source of mutual protection. If one member is threatened, for whatever reason, it is the responsibility of every other member of the family to safeguard that family member from harm, captivity or incarceration. This is the reason that the desert people, to this day, take a dim view of any child who would opt to leave the family for any reason. If that person leaves, then the defenses of the family are just that much weaker.

We take responsibilities. The adopted son was expected to work and further the family fortunes and reputation like every other member of the family. We are expected to take the mission of the family of God as our mission in life. It is a contradiction in terms to speak of an inactive Christian.

We are part of the family defense. In the same way that the rest of the family would come to our aid if we were in any kind of trouble, no matter what the cause, so we have the responsibility to be available for the defense of any and all of the family if need be. Our lives are part of one another. One is never free to think solely of himself. Every choice and decision must be made with the entire family of God in mind.

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, Ephesians 1:5

The word translated "predestined" is "prooridzo" and means "to determine beforehand." It has nothing to do with worthiness. It has everything to do with grace that is determined to offer a family relationship. This adoption is an expression of God's kind intentions. God wills His erring people to be adopted into the family. God predestined our adoption. This left no room for our efforts to produce this gift.

Our adoption was not a belated thought on the part of God. God, from eternity, predestined that we should be adopted into his family. This is an act of divine kindness which one could not fully understand.

IN REFLECTION

The "adopted" son is completely accepted as a full brother; one participating in the life of the family in exactly the same way natural sons are accepted. As "sons of God," it suggests that we are, in the sight of God, as though we had never sinned. Romans 8:14 reminds us that **IF** we are led by the Spirit of God, **THEN** God's Spirit is a guiding participant in every thought, decision, action or word in our lives. It means that the operation of my life is a joint activity between my will and the activity of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower my life.

The opposite is also true. As an adopted son of God, the operation of my life is **NOT** a joint activity of my will and the spirit of bondage. In Romans 8:15 we are reminded that **IF** our lives were controlled by the spirit of bondage or slavery, **THEN** it would be an imposition of the will of the spirit of bondage with no relationship to my will. This is an evil dictatorship.

Romans 8:15 clarifies that we have received the spirit of adoption (the opposite of the spirit of bondage). It is a gift we do not deserve. "The spirit of adoption" allows us to live a life of security, rather than fear, in the midst of trauma. By divine intention, in those moments when life is most devastating and we are tempted to feel abandoned, the awareness of our undeserved adoption as God's child makes room within us for peace in the midst of trauma. The "spirit of adoption" is a power, an authority to claim the privileges of sonship that adoption guarantees. The spirit of adoption enables us to have a personal relationship with

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the Father. This relationship enables us to make our needs known personally rather than through an intermediary.

Paul spoke, in Romans 8:23, of "the first-fruits of the Spirit." The idea of "first fruits" is an Old Testament image. The "first fruits" of the flock, crop and family belonged to God. It was the best of the crop. To speak of "the first fruits of the Spirit" is to identify the greatest power of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower the Christian to live the purified life of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22).

Paul teaches us, in Romans 8:23, that the adopted are not freed from the pain of life, but enabled to be joyfully victorious in the midst of it. Adoption is both ongoing and ultimate. It has meaning for the adopted life now. It culminates in our final redemption of the body.

In Romans 9:4, Paul taught that adoption must be taken seriously. It is one of the major acts of the grace of God for unworthy recipients. This verse mentions Israelites. The adoption was first for the Jewish people, but in Christ it is the grace of God to all who love His appearing.

Galatians 4:5 teaches that the "adoption as sons" rescues all those, both Jews and Gentiles, who love God. Redemption is the enabling of adoption. Intimacy with God is the ultimate purpose of our adoption into His family.

Ephesians 1:5 was Paul's statement that Jesus is the avenue through whom this adoption is made available to unworthy people.

In physical life and in the spiritual realm, adoption takes place because of the desire and action of the one doing the adopting and not by the one being adopted. Our adoption into God's family is one of the primary expressions of His indescribable grace.

By divine intention, in those moments when life is most devastating and we are tempted to feel abandoned, the awareness of our undeserved adoption as children of God makes room with us for peace in the midst of trauma.

Family was the most important human relationship in the ancient world. Being thus understood, it was highly prized. It was vastly different from our current understanding of family. It carried many privileges and some responsibilities as well. The family was where one belonged. His new father became the example, the blueprint for his life. The family sustained him and provided everything he needed.

The adopted son had responsibilities as well. He was required to obey the father as everyone else in the family was required to do. He had to share the work and support of the family with everyone else. In times of stress and danger, he must be a vital part of the family defense system. As the father of the family was guide and example to everyone in the family, so the Holy Spirit is the guide to the adopted sons of God.

The way God adopted Israel as his people, we also are His family. He delights to care for us and bless us, even though He initiated this relationship while we were rebellious against him.

Adoption is a divine action, not a human one. We did not choose Him; He chose us. The best we could do was agree to His choosing. Like the orphan, we had no claim, no relationship. Without need, He took us into His family to relate to us lovingly as His own.

GRAFTED

The idea of grafting a branch into a vine is a concept that every first century reader would understand fully. They had seen it or done it many times. The word Paul used to describe this relationship is "egkentrizo". It is a compound word that is made up as follows:

"En" means "in."

Kentron" means "to prick or goad."

The farmer would take a sharp knife and cut a gash into the vine or tree trunk. A branch was inserted into this gash and held in place by a thin rope or thread. Wax was placed around the incision to seal it up. As time goes by, the wound in the vine "heals" and the grafted branch becomes a part of the vine or tree the same as other branches. In modern times, all our oranges are grown on trees that have the branch of one kind of orange tree grafted into the stem of a heartier type of orange tree.

Only Paul used this image. He spoke of it six times in Romans chapter 11.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree... Romans 11:17

Paul spoke of the "chosen people, Israel, as branches that were "broken off." They were removed from the special relationship as the ones whose lives and relationship with God were a witness to all the nations of the world.

In this verse, Paul spoke of the Gentiles, specifically these Roman believers, being installed in a relationship with God as a branch is grafted into a vine. These Roman Christians were grafted into a relationship with God in the same way a foreign branch is grafted in to become a natural part of the plant.

You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear... Romans 11:19, 20

Paul further clarified the relationship both of the disobedient Jew and the obedient Gentile believers

And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. Romans 11:23

Paul spoke of the kindness of God. Israel, the branch that was "broken off," because of their disobedience will be "grafted in" again if they begin to believe and obey again.

For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? Romans 11:24

The "grafting" is a divine activity, not a human one. Again, Paul taught these Roman Christians about the process by which they became children of God. Paul also taught them how they would be removed if they were disobedient and Israel would be restored, "grafted in" again when they became faithful and obedient. The text does not indicate so, but it is as though Paul had heard Jesus tell His disciples, as recorded in John chapters 14 and 15, about the vine and the branches. The whole point Paul stressed about the grafting is that God takes a people (redeemed Gentiles) and initiates them into His family the way a branch is grafted into a vine. Jesus taught His disciples that the branch must abide in the vine where it receives its life and identity.

IN REFLECTION

Paul used two different images that tell different facets of the same message. "Adoption" and "ingrafting" are two images that tell the beautiful story of our intimate relationship with God.

In both instances, one who was not part of the family is made to be exactly like those who naturally belong. It is a way to become indistinguishable from those who naturally belong.

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It is a picture of God always seeking His creation to share a personal, intimate relationship with Him.

BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The New Testament speaks of Jesus and the Father being in us and we in Them. The Scriptures also speak of the Holy Spirit filling us. One has to wonder if these references describe two different conditions or are they the same.

We must keep in mind that the Trinity always works in unity. All three were involved in the creative act. All three were involved in securing our redemption. Jesus taught that He and the Father would be in us. Paul, however, taught this:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own. I Corinthians 6:19

He was saying that the Holy Spirit is in us as surely as Jesus and the Father are. He also said that our bodies are a place of worship; a sanctuary where the Holy Spirit dwells and receives worship.

We will never with our finite minds, be able to fathom the way in which the Trinity harmoniously carries out the will of the Father. We can be sure, however, that Father Son and Spirit take up residence in the life of the obedient believer.

In the New Testament there are nine different passages where it speaks of being "filled with the Holy Spirit." In eight of these verses, the same word is used. In the ninth instance, a different form of the same word is used. The eight verses were all written by Luke in the Gospel of Luke and in Acts. The ninth verse, written by Paul, appears in Ephesians 5:18.

The word that is translated "filled" is "plaesthaesetai". The word means "to fill to the point of running over." Interestingly, it also was used to describe something that was under the influence of something or someone else. It appears that this is the intent of the word in these verses.

In all nine verses, those who were involved were filled with the Holy Spirit. Their lives were under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit of God. It is clear that the Holy Spirit was guiding, directing them to some specific ministry or action. In each instance, we want to look to see what it was that the Holy Spirit enabled them to accomplish. We hope this investigation will give us some inkling of what is involved in sustaining such an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit.

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb. Luke 1:15

This is the angelic announcement to Zacharias concerning the birth of John who was called "the Baptist." This had to be a shocking discovery of what his son's life would be like. The angel said three things about John:

1. HE WILL BE GREAT IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD

In reflection, he was great in the sight of some people, but certainly not all of them. The angel said, however, "in the sight of the Lord." This has a lot to say about the quality of his life. Because he was considered "great in the sight of the Lord," it is not surprising that there were many who were offended by such greatness.

2. HE WOULD DRINK NEITHER WINE NOR STRONG DRINK

This is not necessarily an announcement that John would be under the Nazirite vow. People who take this vow do refrain from drinking either wine or strong drink. They also never cut their hair. The Nazirite vow, however, was not for life, but for a stated time and purpose. Neither of these last two conditions was mentioned by the angel. This announcement probably did not indicate that he would be a Nazirite for life, but it was something of the same nature.

3. HE WOULD BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM BEFORE BIRTH

Again, the word translated "filled" is "plaesthaesetai" and means "to be filled to the point of being full and running over." It was also used to describe something that was influenced by another. John the Baptist

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would be a person who from before his birth was completely under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This helps one understand how he could have such clear insights into the person and ministry of Jesus and how he could so clearly understand the alternative motives of the religious leaders who came to hear him preach. It gives us a clue as to how he could have such a lofty understanding of his second cousin and such a humble view of himself. His clothing and his menu would point to the prophetic ministry to which he was called. The courage and insight of his message to the Jewish leaders was nothing short of miraculous. He told them to repent. He also told them to be baptized. The Jews had two needs for baptism. A person who wished to become a Jew had to be baptized. On the day a priest served at the altar for the first time, he had to be baptized. John was either telling these religious leaders that they were Gentiles and if they wanted to be Jews they would have to be baptized or he might also have been telling them that they were not really priests and that they would need to be baptized before they would be prepared to serve at the altar of the temple. This shocking message was preached to them when they were well aware that he was also of the tribe of Levi and old enough to be serving at the altar as they were but refused to do so because of the sins of the practicing priesthood. Like many other Levites, John was ashamed to serve at the altar and chose to live a difficult desert life in preference to being disobedient to God and living a life of opulence as the evil priests in Jerusalem were doing. The fact that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit since even before his birth helps one understand how he could live such a strong, vibrant witness for God.

And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord. Luke 1:41-45

There are a number of events here that we should observe:

1. In verse 41, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb when Mary greeted her.
2. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
3. These things happened while Mary was speaking her greeting to her cousin.
4. Elizabeth cried out, "Blessed among women are you," speaking to Mary.
5. Also in verse 42, she cried out, Blessed is the fruit of your womb!"
This is very interesting. Certainly the rest of the family would not necessarily be shouting for joy that this unmarried relative was quite pregnant and claiming that this was an act of God.
6. There is evidence of Elizabeth's humility in verse 43. She was an elderly woman who had endured serious embarrassment and harassment because she was barren. This was considered a shameful thing among the Jews and thought to be a judgment from God. This pain was increased because her husband was a priest. Elizabeth was the cousin of Mary, and much older than she. Still she was humbled that this young cousin had come to be with her during the closing months of her pregnancy.

Certainly, Mary knew that the time for Elizabeth's baby to be born was very near. It is probable that Mary had come for the specific purpose of helping during the time of the birth.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth was prophetic. Observe that the filling with the Holy Spirit was an enabling for service. She believed that the baby was not Joseph's and this would be difficult for anyone to believe, to say the least. She was a woman of faith. She was convinced that Mary's baby was to be the Messiah. She blessed Mary for believing that the ancient prophesy of Messiah was coming true as the angel had told Mary several months earlier. This involves great faith to be sure. It requires great trust in God that this humanly impossible thing could actually be the action of God in faithfulness to His ancient word. The Holy Spirit enabled Elizabeth to rejoice in what would cause the remainder of the family

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great anger and shame. Wonderfully, the influence of the Holy Spirit causes the most common of people to be enabled to do the most uncommon ministries on behalf of God and do them as though they were just another event in a regular day.

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying... Luke 1:67

As you study the message the Holy Spirit influenced Zacharias to prophesy, in Luke 1:68-79, you become aware that there are a number of things that Zacharias was doing as he sang the praises of God:

- a. He blessed and praised God – verse 68
- b. He recognized this special event as part of God's promised redemption for Israel. Human logic would not have told him this – verse 68
- c. Speaking of the horn of salvation in the house of David is a prophetic reference to Jesus – verse 69
- d. He saw that God spoke through the ancient prophets to announce the coming of Christ and he saw John's part in that divine initiative – verse 70
- e. He saw that Psalm 106:10 was Messianic and spoke of Jesus – verse 71
- f. He recognized that Psalm 105:8 and Micah 7:20 were references to the ministry of Jesus fulfilling the ancient prophecies – verse 72
- g. He could understand that Genesis 22:16 was a reference to the coming of Jesus as the sacrifice. Only the Holy Spirit could have shown him this – verse 73
- h. Zacharias could discern that his son, John, would be the announcer, the herald of the Messiah, Jesus – verse 76
- i. Zacharias could see that Isaiah 9:2 and 59:8 were prophecies of the coming of Jesus as the Messiah – verse 79

This is a beautiful sonnet of praise. Because he was filled with the Holy Spirit of God, Zacharias could discern the fulfillment of many ancient prophecies about the coming of Jesus in a way that the leading Jewish scholars were unable to grasp. He also was enabled to proclaim them in Spirit-inspired verse. The filling of the Holy Spirit, as described in these verses, resulted in the Holy Spirit enabling both the discernment and the praise that followed. Here again, the filling with the Holy Spirit was for the purpose of serving as God willed for him to serve.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. Acts 2:4

This is an awe-inspiring event. The context of verse four is important for our consideration. Jesus told the disciples and those who were with them to return to Jerusalem. They obeyed. They went back to the upper room and prayed in expectation. The coming of the Holy Spirit was with accompanying signs that are associated with the Holy Spirit – wind and flame. Observe that the filling with the Holy Spirit was not selective. The Spirit came upon every person in the room – apostles and common followers of Jesus. The apostles and other followers of Jesus did not bring the Holy Spirit upon themselves. They were acted upon. Certainly, their speaking in other tongues was not their own doing. It was as the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak.

From the following context, Acts 2:5-11, we know that the people from fifteen or sixteen different countries and climes heard the disciples speak in the language of the country from which these visitors to Jerusalem had come. The response of these people was very important. They were filled with amazement. There were some who believed and others thought that the disciples were simply filled with sweet wine. The things that the apostles spoke in these different languages were uniform in message – they spoke of the

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mighty acts of God. The speaking in tongues was for the purpose of informing the unacquainted and unbelieving of what God was like and what God was doing.

And Peter filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how the man was made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands here before you in good health. Acts 4:8-10

Peter and John were arrested a second time over their healing of the lame man. They spent the night in prison and were brought before the Council the next day. The context indicates that about 5,000 people had heard them preach and believed on Christ. This was a serious threat to the power and prestige of the members of the Council who were unable to do any such thing themselves. It was a fear that the people would place more confidence in these followers of Jesus than in the members of the Council.

Because of the popularity of the disciples, the Council could not ask the questions they wanted to ask or punish these men the way they wanted to do. They finally asked them, "By what power or in what name you have done this?" The two parts of this question mean the same thing. They thought of a name as possessing certain powers. When you pray in the name of Jesus, you are accessing the power that is His before the Father. The Council knew the answer to the question, but they hoped that they could get the two to make some incriminating statement or claim. It did not happen.

The question is an interesting one. Peter and John were not accused of doing anything wrong. There is no doubt that the Council would have rejoiced if they could have found some wrong doing in these two, but they could not. The presence of the healed beggar was a severe problem confronting the Council and they could not deny that something wonderful had happened in the life of this man. They were afraid that people might ask why they had not done the same thing for this man who had been in this condition for more than 40 years.

The 5,000 people who had heard Peter and John and had seen the miracle were an even greater problem for the Council. The statement Peter made, in Acts 4:8-10 was in answer to the Council's question.

Before Peter began to speak, Luke tells us that the apostle was filled with the Holy Spirit. The courage of Peter's response is an astonishing contrast with his denial of knowing Christ while outside the palace of the High Priest before the crucifixion. It is interesting that Peter answered the question in much the same way he had heard Jesus answer these questions on many occasions. Jesus heard plainly the questions the Pharisees asked. He then clarified their question and dealt with the question they should have asked in the first place. Peter did exactly the same thing in his answer to the Council. They asked by what power or name Peter had healed this lame man. Peter answered "If we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how the man was made well..." Peter then gave his answer. We must keep in mind that Peter had denied knowing Jesus and these men would have been aware of that fact. Now Peter, only a very short time later courageously witnesses to the greatness and power of a forgiving God. Peter gave them much more information than they requested. They asked by what name this happened. Peter told them that it was the name of Jesus. He went further, however, to honestly tell them that this is the One whom they crucified and whom God raised from the dead. That was additional information that they would have preferred not to hear.

Their problem, at this point, was that in order for them to deny the resurrection, they would have to deny the teachings of some of their greatest prophets. They discovered that the resurrection was an increasing threat to their position and power.

Again, Peter emphasized that the lame man was healed by the name of Jesus, whom the Council had arranged to have crucified. Peter went on, again, to tell them some more information about Jesus. He is the One whom the builders rejected. This set the stage for him to speak again about the healing and the

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resurrection. He confidently announced to temple leaders that Jesus was the only one in whom there was salvation.

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:31

The context is again the trial of Peter and John. The Council was in a dilemma. They could not deny the healing of the lame man. On the other hand, they could find no law that the disciples had violated. The disciples' only crime was that their true power with God threatened the power and position of the Council and they did not dare to admit this or allow others to discover it. Having no legal pressure, they could apply to these two apostles, the Council threatened the two and released them. Peter and John returned to the gathering of Christians and reported the events of that day. Everyone in the group praised God with one accord. It is interesting that they did not pray for an end of the opposition from the Council for they would be very certain that the opposition would continue and increase. They prayed for yet greater confidence in witnessing in the face of growing persecution. They asked God for more and greater miracles that were certainly an invitation to yet more persecution and opposition. The text states that at this point the place was shaken. This was a display of divine power. The filling with the Holy Spirit was followed by speaking the word of God with boldness. Repeatedly, the filling with the Holy Spirit is an empowering and an enabling for a greater and bolder witness and service. Observe, again, that it was not just Peter and John who were filled with the Holy Spirit. All the believers who were gathered there were filled.

And Ananias departed and entered into the house and after laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Acts 9:17

The filling with the Holy Spirit, for Saul, was preceded by stark risk of obedience on the part of Ananias. This obedience took place in what appeared to be sheer madness to Ananias, whom God called upon to minister to Saul. The result was that Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit and his blindness was healed. There is a question in the minds of some whether Saul was converted on the Damascus Road or here, in the presence of Ananias. Whichever it was, Saul was baptized at this point.

But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "You who are filled with all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord. Acts 13:9

This experience takes place on Paul's first missionary journey. The text literally says, "having been filled." It is an aorist passive participle. The text does not clarify exactly what "having been filled" really means. It could be that Luke is pointing to the source of Paul's insight. It could also mean that this happened after Ananias ministered to Paul and he was filled with the Spirit. We cannot say for certain.

Whichever it was, Paul was enabled to deal with the enemies' opposition. He had Spirit-directed insight into the motives and actions of the false prophet Bar-Jesus. Paul spoke boldly condemning the attempted opposition and distraction of this enemy of the Gospel. It enabled Paul to deal with obstruction to his witness to Christ.

Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. That was much more than an exhilarating experience. It was an enabling for ministry in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Paul had great mental ability and had studied well, but none of this can account for the tremendous impact he had for God in the life of the church. It is a vivid display of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to guide and do His work through a willing servant. This is a different facet of the intimate relationship God sustains with those who boldly love and serve Him.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:18

In this verse Paul draws a sharp contrast between getting "drunk with wine" and "being filled with the Spirit." The contrast looks like this:

Where Are You ?!

DRUNK WITH WINE

1. It results in dissipation – a manner of life that destroys the self. The emphasis is on lack of discipline.
2. It involves the loss of personal control. It is being under no control whatsoever.
3. It is temporary – fortunately the strong effects will wear off.
4. It is unhealthy – it leads to destruction and ends in physical deterioration

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

1. This text doesn't describe its characteristics. Other texts describe it as disciplined, effective, useful to accomplish the will of God.
2. It involves sustained control in order to place the life in control of the Holy Spirit.
3. It is a lifestyle – literally be being filled with the Holy Spirit as a process of life.
4. Tremendously useful and builds up the person.

In Ephesians, Paul instructed growing believers about how to live a holy life in the midst of a pagan culture that attacks righteousness. This is particularly important since these believers had, at one time, been a vital part of this vile culture. In this very chapter, Paul gave them a series of very intentional commands.

- a. Be imitators of God – 5:1
- b. Flee immorality 5:3
- c. Walk as children of light 5:8
- d. Expose unfruitful deeds of darkness 5:11
- e. Walk as wise men 5:15
- f. Do not get drunk with wine – do not surrender the self to the bondage of alcohol 5:18
- g. Rather, be filled with the Spirit – 5:18
 1. One might translate this, "Be being filled and never stop being filled."
 2. It is not a completed action.
 3. It is rather presented as a lifestyle, a way of life.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is an ongoing process of surrendering the self to the control of the Holy Spirit in order to continue to grow in a holy way of life like that of God and serve God effectively under the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said in this chapter, "Be imitators of God." (Ephesians 5:1)

IN REFLECTION

There are a number of things one can say about being filled with the Holy Spirit on the basis of these places where the instruction was given. The filling with the Holy Spirit came upon both individuals and on groups with no apparent difference in the results of that filling. In each instance where people were filled with the Holy Spirit, it was an enabling for service to God. The filling with the Holy Spirit prepared people either to witness or to celebrate in praise or both. The Holy Spirit fills imperfect vessels – Peter – and enables these witnesses to boldly proclaim the guilt of the Jewish leaders and the salvation that Christ offered. This describes the great power that God has invested in the Holy Spirit. The filling with the Holy Spirit is accompanied with a display of divine power.

In each instance, where a person or group was filled with the Holy Spirit, it focused attention on the greatness and power of God and did not focus attention and praise upon the person or group involved.

The filling with the Holy Spirit leads to speaking the word of God with boldness. Note that the Holy Spirit filled people when they were of one accord. The filling with the Holy Spirit repeatedly takes place in the face of opposition and persecution. The filling with the Holy Spirit takes place against the backdrop of seemingly irrational obedience – (Ananias going to see Saul). In each of the verses, the same word is used

BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

in a variety of forms. The filling with the Holy Spirit is something that the Holy Spirit does. "Being filled with the Holy Spirit" appears in nine different verses in the New Testament – Luke 1:15; 1:41; 1:67; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 9:17; 13:9; Ephesians 5:18. Though the forms will differ in some respects, the word translated "filled" in each of these verses is in the passive voice. This form always describes something that is done to or for you rather than something you do for yourself. Observe that in each of these verses it is stated "filled WITH the Holy Spirit." In not one of these verses did anyone ask God to fill them with the Holy Spirit. Luke 11:13 is a possible exception to this rule. God took the initiative and filled these believers with the Holy Spirit. This filling is for service, not for spiritual comfort. It is not an exclusive gift, but rather is given when God finds those who will witness and serve Him with courage and boldness. If we, as believers, would desire an intimate relationship with God, then it will require that we be filled with the Holy Spirit. It will not make us super-believers. It will enable us to be effective witnesses and imitators of God, able to show a dying world what Jesus is like.

SOME THINGS GOD TAUGHT IN CHRIST, THE SOURCE OF POWER

One of the things that impressed people concerning the ministry of Jesus was the power that attended His teaching. The evil spirits obeyed His commands, the blind could see, the lame could walk, the highly trained Scribes were silenced before the wisdom of His teaching. The crowds gladly listened to Him because He spoke with authority and not like the Scribes.

After the day of Pentecost, the early church displayed this same power. In the history of the church, there have been several occasions when this irresistible divine power has been evidenced. Certainly you will remember the story of Martin Luther. Though the church tried desperately to silence him, the harder they tried, the more effective his mission became. His life was often on the line, but the power that was his, "in Christ," enabled him to overcome and set a new direction for the whole body of Christ. Unfortunately, it has not always been that obvious.

The New Testament, however, clearly teaches that being "in Christ" is a source of monumental power. Paul particularly describes this great source of power in a number of places in his letters to the churches.

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus,, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons. Philippians 1:1

Paul greeted the churches to whom he wrote in some interesting ways. In that process, Paul gave us helpful information about being "in Christ."

In this verse, Paul associated "being in Christ" with being "saints." It is more than simply being forgiven. It is the power to enable the forgiven person to become a "saint." By "saint," Paul did not mean people who never make mistakes or do anything disobedient. It rather describes forgiven people who are holy; people who are increasingly becoming like their Lord.

Observe that Paul began by speaking of himself and Timothy as "bondservants of Christ Jesus." There is an enabling in Christ Jesus to be bondservants; people who are servants by choice and not by force; people whose reason to live is for the purposes and benefits of their Lord Jesus Christ and not for self.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14

The Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments remind us that those who serve God will endure some degree of opposition, if not persecution. This relationship of "being in Christ," enables the believer to press on and keep pressing on toward the ultimate goal of eternal life, being pleasing to God. Being "in Christ" enables the believer to increasingly respond to the upward call of God in terms of Christian maturity and becoming increasingly imitators of God. Martin Luther struggled with this idea for years. He tried many things seeking to live a holy life. He learned that oppression of the human body does not produce the result he sought. Strict religious regimen was not helpful either. The forgiven sinner "in Christ" discovers the power of God released in his/her life enabling the active pursuit of a holy way of life.

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints... Colossians 1:4

Paul identified two spiritual qualities. For the forgiven sinner "in Christ," there is no way to mature in our faith in Christ aside from this intimate relationship with Him. The maturing of one's faith "in Christ" is a product of their experience of the trustworthiness of Christ that in turn enables them to have faith in Him for still greater things.

Paul, also, described an intimate relationship with all the saints. We all know some saints that are a challenge to one's ability to love that brother or sister with agapae love. It may be what appears to be pride, arrogance, ill-temper, self-serving or a number of other less than lovely characteristics that challenge one's ability to honestly love that brother or sister.

Where Are You ?!

It is the enabling of God, for those who are "in Christ," to move us ever closer to extending agapae love to all believers despite their weaknesses. As you can see, in this verse, Paul described a growing relationship both with God and all the saints.

And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. Colossians 1:28

In this verse, Paul viewed the power of "being in Christ" from two perspectives. "In Christ," Paul found power to disciple new believers. "In Christ" he found the power to admonish those who were sinners to respond to the Holy Spirit as He draws us to Christ. Being "in Christ" Paul found the wisdom to encourage and teach new believers how to live an increasingly holy life.

Paul, also, viewed this intimate relationship with God from the perspective of the new believer. His past sins are forgiven, but many aspects of his former way of life still plague him and stunt his spiritual growth. In Christ, these people find the strength to become increasingly mature, complete in their faith "in Christ." In some former translations the word here translated "complete" was translated "perfect." This word comes from the "agora," the marketplace. First century people also had difficulty with being cheated by the use of false weights. They developed a rule that enabled them to always get the proper amount of food for which they paid. They would place their container in the bin. When it was filled up and running over on all sides, it was then "complete," "perfect."

We must keep in mind that it is impossible for the believer "in Christ" to be perfect/ flawless this side of the cemetery. It is possible for them to be "complete," all that God intends us to be at this point in our growing maturity

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 2:1

Paul was trying to encourage Timothy who apparently was getting very nervous over the opposition he encountered concerning his faith. As with any of us, he was unable to face this opposition in his own strength. Paul wanted him to realize, however, that there is an expression of grace available to every person "in Christ." Thus, Timothy had available to him all the power he needed to be strong against serious opposition because he was "in Christ."

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. 2 Timothy 2:10

Here, Paul demonstrated what he described for Timothy in 2:1. Paul exposed himself to a variety of kinds of persecution to secure the opportunity to witness to those who have no positive relationship with Christ. He was prepared to endure whatever was necessary in order to bring the good news to the lost. The salvation that is available to those who are "in Christ" is far more than forgiveness of the past. It describes a relationship with Christ that brings forgiveness of the past and strengthens us to live an increasingly godly life until at last we are taken home to share eternal life with the Lord. This is the salvation that is available in Christ Jesus. It enables us to so live "in Christ" that we will share eternal life with the Lord along with all those who are also "in Christ."

There are those who think of being "In Christ" as an emotional high with no real contact with the struggles of everyday life. Paul wants these people to realize that "being in Christ" offers us all the power needed to be victorious in our struggle against every attack of evil. These challenges will inevitably come our way.

IN REFLECTION

Though it is not often considered, being "in Christ" is a great source of power. It will enable the saints to mature and become complete in their faith. It is the strength one needs to be holy.

Despite what critics and enemies might say, being "in Christ" enables one to be strong. They can successfully endure opposition as Jesus did. They are able to look upon adversity not as a threat to spiritual survival, but as an increase in their strength and maturity in their drive to follow the example of Jesus.

IN CHRIST, THE SOURCE OF POWER

THE QUALITIES OF LIFE "IN CHRIST"

Being "in Christ" involves much more than obtaining forgiveness for the sins of the past. It includes our forgiveness, to be sure, but there is more. As one studies the passages that speak of being "in Christ" it becomes apparent that there are certain qualities that are to be found among these blest people. We need to study these passages to determine what qualities these people share.

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test? II Corinthians 13:5

Paul was writing to the Corinthian Christians about the quality of their faith. He was saying that it is possible to know that you are "in the faith." This removes the uncertainty about one's future. One of the qualities of being a Christian is the ability to know that "Jesus Christ is in you." This means that it is always inappropriate to say that we are all alone. Jesus Christ is always abiding within. Both the Old and New Testaments highlight the fact that there is a special, intimate relationship existing between God and His people. The Old Testament used visual images to convey this truth. The image of the cloud at the Tabernacle is one of the best depictions of this truth. In the same way that the pillar of cloud hovered over the Tabernacle in the midst of Israel, so Jesus takes up residence within the heart of every believer. This also gives one a special awareness that they are a temple; the place of worship; the dwelling place of the Savior of people in every generation. In an age when monumental forces tend to depersonalize our humanity, it is good to know that there is one place where we are affirmed, special.

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:5

In this verse, Paul gave us some information about what it means personally to be "in Christ." Paul said, "We who are many are one body." Being "in Christ" involves being part of something beyond ourselves. We are not less important because we are a part of this larger group. Realizing that we are part of one body in Christ, Paul takes the next step to say that we are "individually members one of another." This suggests that everything that happens in your life should have a mutual effect upon my life. If you sense severe pain, then the intensity should not be less in me than in you. Because of this, we never suffer alone. Pain is difficult to endure. Pain in isolation is almost unbearable. Because we are individually members of one another, pain and difficulty are shared experiences. There can be no loneliness as we rejoice in the victories of our spiritual journey. This is a picture of the family relationship which is another image that is used to describe that intimate relationship we share with Christ in God. This whole picture speaks of a depth of unity that exists within the body that functions as a single unit. As Christians, we constantly function and share relationships on two different levels. Our primary relationship is with God. As we share in fellowship with God, we gain insight into the dynamics of our relationships with other believers. As we reflect upon our relationships with each other, it fleshes out, in our minds, the depth of our relationship with God. These two relationships feed upon each other.

In a church we served, there was a man and wife who still pray for us each day. They are concerned about our ministry. They always want to know how they can pray for us. This couple is definitely a part of our lives. On one occasion, I had a physical problem. While I was hospitalized, they called daily for an update so they could pray for us. To call them "friends" is insufficient. They are family. They are, each day, a part of our lives.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours... 1 Corinthians 1:2

Paul spoke of the Christians at Corinth as "sanctified." The word so translated is "hagios". This word contains two separate but related ideas. First, it describes being set apart for divine service and possession.

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This idea comes from the Old Testament sacrificial system. The sacrificial animal was first approved and then set apart for sacrifice. It was available for no other purpose. The priests were also "sanctified" as were the men who made the utensils for use in the Tabernacle. Secondly, the "sanctified" were people who live a purified life. They were not perfect, but cleansed. For purposes of unusual emphasis, Paul added, "saints by calling." The word translated "saints" is also "hagios." In this context, it might also be translated "holy ones." Whatever else may be involved being "in Christ," these people will view their primary purpose in life as being set apart to serve and please God. They will be characterized by an increasingly holy lifestyle. It is to be increasingly similar to the character of Jesus.

Paul also said of them, "who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." One of the marks of those "in Christ" is that they have fellowship with God in prayer. He is not someone to call when severe need arises. It is a fellowship they share each day. Paul also spoke of a common servanthood that is shared within this. Paul spoke of Jesus as their "Lord." We have a common bond in our commitment to do the bidding of our Lord. We may not all speak the same language, but there is a common determination to give our lives to do as He commands.

While I was teaching in Indonesia, recently, there were some in the class who had experienced a heavy price for their faith. One class member had his home burned the day before he came to the school. The father of another student was a pastor and was gunned down because he was a Christian just one week before this student came to school. Nevertheless, he came to learn, to prepare himself for the same experience, if necessary.

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption... 1 Corinthians 1:30

Paul said, "in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God." The word translated "wisdom" is "sophia". It means insight into the true nature of things. It is a comprehension of why things are the way that they are. It is an awareness of what life can become "in Christ." This is a picture of spiritual discernment. The level of one's educational opportunity bears no necessary resemblance to the wisdom he may demonstrate. Indeed, wisdom and educational opportunity bear no necessary relationship to each other at all. Paul was one of the most highly educated men of his day and it was obvious in his epistles. Peter, on the other hand, apparently had a minimum of educational opportunity, but in his writings he presents a depth of understanding of holy living that is not surpassed by the best trained minds. Christ is our wisdom. This wisdom is ours when we are **in Him**.

Paul also said, "In Christ Jesus, who became to us righteousness from God." The word translated "righteousness" is "dikaiousune". It is "the quality of being right and just." It is most often used to describe the gift of God to people whereby all who believe in Christ Jesus are brought into a right relationship with God. Righteousness is to increasingly become what God intended when He created man and woman. It is to increasingly demonstrate a character that is not an affront to the holiness of God. Righteousness is not something we achieve, but rather a quality of life that God in Christ produces within us.

Again, Christ is our righteousness. We do not become righteous by our own doing, but by being "in Christ." It is a gift from God. The New Testament writer James, the half-brother of Jesus, comes to mind. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that during much of Jesus' ministry, James was most unhappy with the fact that Jesus left the family. James came to take Jesus home lest He embarrass the family further. When Jesus preached in the Nazareth synagogue, there is no mention that James was present. In apparent sarcasm, the brothers urged Jesus to go to Jerusalem knowing that there were those who wanted to kill him. Though Roman law provided that the immediate family could claim the body of one crucified, he did not claim the body of Jesus. From the cross, Jesus placed His mother in the care of John, not James and Mary spent the rest of her life in John's care. After the resurrection, however, James was a different man. Though it involved great risk, James was in the upper room with the other disciples. For many years, James was the leader of the church in spite of the fact that it became increasingly dangerous to be identified as a follower

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of Jesus in a land under Roman control. As head of the church, James convened the Council to decide whether Gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jews. In the struggle over this issue, he ultimately made the decision for the church. James was such a threat to the religious establishment that they ultimately murdered him. His epistle gives us one of the clearest descriptions of righteousness in action to be found in Scripture. This is the kind of lifestyle Paul alluded to when speaking of Christ as our righteousness.

Paul continued, "In Christ Jesus, who became to us sanctification from God." The word translated "sanctification" is "hagiasmos". As we indicated in our observations on I Corinthians 1:2, it means "to separate." It was used to describe the separation of the self to God for His use and service. It is God's will for the believer. This is an image taken straight from the Old Testament sacrificial system. The priests were set apart for the service of God. They were not available for any other vocation. The animals used for sacrifice were sanctified. They could not be treated as the other animals were treated. They were unavailable for any other use than for sacrifice. In the life of the sanctified believer, God must be the priority of our lives. Nothing else can be the priority of our time and skill.

Ruth and I graduated from a missionary training school in Nyack, New York. There was a professor there who lived an obviously holy life. He was important enough in our lives that we named our son after him. He was a man holy and humble. People would stand just outside the door of his classroom just to hear him pray. When I read the list of the "fruits of the Spirit" I think of his Spirit-filled life.

Secondly, Paul used this word to describe the separation of the believer from evil things and ways. It is learned from God and taught by the Scripture. It is pursued by the development of holy character. It is a personal relationship and cannot be passed on to us by others. It is brought about in the believer by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Again, Paul said, "In Christ Jesus, who became to us redemption." The word translated "redemption" is "apolutrosis" which is a compound word. It was formed by putting two Greek words together. The Greek word "apo" means "off, from" or separation." The Greek word "lutron" means "to redeem." The compound word means to redeem by buying back. It is what the heir of a family did if one of his brothers became a servant through bankruptcy. It was used to describe our redemption where Christ paid the price of our salvation. If you study this list, you see that the idea of redemption appears twice in the four qualities. This is because righteousness refers to our forgiveness from sin, but redemption refers to that final act whereby God grants to us the joyous privilege of spending eternity in His heavenly presence. It suggests that this is something that God does for us through Christ. It appears that this list is progressive. One quality follows another – wisdom, then righteousness which leads to sanctification which prepares us for His eternal presence in redemption. These four qualities are found "in Christ" and nowhere else. This is because the qualities are in Christ, and only those who are in Him have access to these wonderful gifts from God.

In 1991 I started participating in a prison ministry in Colorado. We presented a short course in Christianity about twice a year. On my first trip in, I met a resident who seemed as nice as any of us who went into the facility to present the program. I wondered, why is he here? I discovered that he had asked the Lord to change his life. Changed he was! Over the years he was a resident, he worked and shared with us. Eventually he completed his time. Today he is a wonderful witness for the Lord and working with other residents as they are released from prison. He is a real trophy of grace.

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. 1 Corinthians 4:17

Paul told the Corinthian believers about two qualities that were found in Timothy, his associate. He said that Timothy was his "beloved child." The word translated "beloved" is again the word "agapae." Paul called Timothy his child because he had led him to the Lord and disciplined him in the faith. He spoke of Timothy as beloved because this is the relationship Paul sustained with Timothy. Paul cared for this young

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believer with an affection that had no limits. It was a relationship of love whether Timothy did as Paul wanted or not. It was an act of love, not a reaction or response for obedience.

Paul also said that Timothy was faithful. We too often think of "faithful" as a synonym for dependable. It will include that, but there must be more. It is a life that is literally filled with faith. Faith is a gift from God, not the product of our striving. Timothy was a believer in whom God had planted the gift of trust in God for all of life. These gifts are some of the qualities that one has the right to expect to see that God has performed in the life of that person who is "in Christ."

In 1937, our pastor started a bowery mission on "skid row" in Detroit. My parents and I went each Thursday evening to help. We sang solos and duets, handed out sandwiches and just helped in general. One night as I handed out sandwiches, two men helped a third man through the line. He was too drunk to walk. I still remember vividly placing that very white sandwich in his very dirty hand. I wondered about him. His name was Tom Crocker. He had once been a city official in Detroit.

Twelve years later, I was attending school in Chicago. One Sunday evening I went to the bowery in Chicago to help in the service. To my surprise, when the pastor stood up to preach I was shocked to discover that it was Tom Crocker. For many years he loved and cared for the derelicts on skid row in Chicago. Every man on the street knew and respected "cap'n Tom." I watched him weep over men who, like what he had been, were too drunk to walk. He carried them into the church so that they would not freeze to death in the cold of winter. This kind of faithfulness, though it seems rare, is really quite common among those who are "in Christ."

Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 2 Thessalonians 3:12

Paul also added a very subtle piece of information about those who are "in Christ." He said, "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord." There is a responsible relationship among those who are "in Christ." Some are in places of responsibility for the direction of others. Because of their humility and mutual submission, they are able to receive the commands of those in responsibility without being humiliated in the process. This quality, available only "in Christ," is beautiful to behold.

In a growing number of places, among myriads of people, there seems to be a mushrooming tendency to find someone to be responsible for life's needs and not do anything for oneself. In this verse, Paul said that those who are "in Christ" fervently, but quietly take care for themselves. They would be glad to help others in need, but if they are physically able, they are determined not to burden others with their care.

And the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:14

Paul mentioned three different qualities in this verse. He spoke of "grace." As previously indicated this is the word "charis". It stands for that which causes favorable impressions and conditions. It is usually defined as "unmerited favor," "a gift from God." It is evident in His kind disposition toward us. It expresses lovingkindness and divine favor. It is freely given and cannot be earned.

Paul also spoke of "faith." The Greek word translated "faith" is "pistis". It stands for a strong conviction or persuasion based not on sight, but upon the dependability of God. To be "in Christ" is to be surrounded by people who share this kind of dependence upon God.

Finally, Paul spoke of "love." This love is agapae. Again, it describes the highest form of love. It is the word that is almost always used to describe the love of God. It is not just that these qualities are present, but they are overflowing from every person in that beautiful relationship. Being "in Christ" places one in constant relationship with people who share all three of these qualities in their lives.

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 1:13

IN CHRIST, THE SOURCE OF POWER

In this verse, Paul mentioned three qualities that are characteristic of those who are "in Christ." Productive society is dependent upon sound words, integrity in words and deeds. If there is not a basic trust, the society will continue to come apart and eventually be destroyed. Those who are "in Christ" have a standard of integrity that is unique in society. There also is a depth of faith in this relationship of being "in Christ." When there is no faith, people have nothing to sustain them in times of difficulty. For those who are "in Christ" there is a life of intense faith.

Our world is void of the quality of love. In such a situation, those who are "in Christ" express a depth of love that is startling to those outside the relationship

And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. II Timothy 3:12

There are at least two pieces of important information in this verse. Those who share this relationship will live a godly life. The word that is translated "godly" is "eusebia" which is a compound word. This word is composed of two Greek words: "Eu" means "good" or "well." The word "sebomai" means to be very "devout" in one's faith "in Christ." Those with whom we share this relationship "in Christ" will live a godly life.

The second truth in this verse is that those who are "in Christ" will be persecuted. They will suffer, even to the point of death, having done nothing wrong.

Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Philemon 20

Again, Paul urged Philemon to release Onesimus, his slave, who had done a punishable crime. We need to keep in mind that "in the Lord" and "in Christ" are synonymous. In this relationship, people are able to provide benefit and blessing for each other.

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:14

Peter and his hearers were quite familiar with this custom. The kiss was one of the four signs of Hebrew forgiveness that they shared with each other. To greet a person with a kiss is to say, there is no trouble between the two of us. "In Christ" it is clear that there are no reservations between the people who share this relationship with the Lord. They are instructed to let each other know that there is peace between them. Peace is the quality of life that every person "in Christ" should expect. It does not mean that everything will always be nice and easy. It does mean that despite what conditions may prevail, we can have peace, "in Christ."

People outside the church often look upon the Christian life as rigid, restrictive and boring. Unfortunately, if you listen to some Christians or watch their lives, you get the same impression of their walk with God.

IN REFLECTION

If you read again, the verses we have quoted in this study, you get a very different impression. They speak of confidence, wisdom, righteousness, pure and holy living, faithfulness, grace, love, godliness and peace. These are wonderful qualities that one experiences as one shares the intimate relationship of being "in Christ." If you think about these wonderful qualities, again it becomes clear that together they form an indescribable atmosphere in which to live for God and serve Him with your full heart.

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Being "in Christ" involves a number of things, but first and foremost it is a series of relationships with God, other believers and non-believers as well. These relationships are qualitatively different from all other relationships in which human beings are involved. In this part of the study, we want to pursue some of these relationships to describe what they are like and what they mean in our lives.

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Romans 12:5

This is a very strong statement. It is written in such a way that it is very emphatic. There are two different pictures of one relationship. Paul said, we are many, but one body. This is essentially the same image we saw as the body of Christ. The image of a body is quite graphic. Like an automobile, there are many parts. You can have all the parts and not have a car. It only becomes a car when you put those parts together and the parts work with each other. If the parts do not work in conjunction with each other, you do not have a car. If the parts of the body do not work together, you do not have a living body for very long.

Immediately following World War II, I worked for a trucking company in Detroit. At that time, you could not buy a new truck and the company needed one badly. They found an old truck body and removed all the parts. They bought all new parts. The parts of that truck were all over their garage. All the parts were there, but it was not a truck. They put all the parts together and it was an excellent "new truck." It became more than a collection of automotive parts when these parts were placed together in such a way that they could work together to accomplish a single purpose. Each part must perform its particular task along with all the other parts. We are not really a body in Christ if each part works separately from all the others.

We are members one of another. This means that we are part of everything that happens in the lives of the other members. We feel the cutting edge of their pain. We cringe with their sorrow. We also exult with their joy. We minister to each other's needs and help with the weaknesses of each one. It is NOT just that we have the potential of being the body of Christ. It IS that we function as a vital part of each other's lives. It IS that the giftedness of your life becomes personally involved in the problems and even the joys of my life. We are all sensitive to another person's weaknesses and needs.

Each week my wife and I are part of a Bible Study group. Several of these are older persons. We pray for each other's needs each week. We also pray for these needs on a daily basis. My wife and I were facing a particularly difficult situation and we shared this need with the group. They prayed for the need that night. However, each day that week someone would call just to find out how things were going, because they had been praying for us. They were being a definite part of our lives.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus... Romans 16:3

These people worked with Paul in Corinth. Paul spoke of them as "fellow workers." This is a compound word and is made up as follows: The word "sun" means "with." The word "ergon" means "work." Paul's intent here is that they worked alongside each other in the ministry. Note that they were "fellow workers in Christ." "In Christ" defines the kind of relationship they had together. This is a qualitatively different kind of relationship from any other kind of human relationship. It involves a depth of mutual caring, otherwise unknown as they seek to serve God together.

Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved Romans... 16:9

As he concludes the epistle, Paul sent personal greetings to many friends in Rome. This was a very common practice. In our discussion of Romans 16:3, we described the meaning of "fellow worker." This includes both a relationship to each other as well as a mutual sense of ministry they share with the Lord. It involves a personal investment, a personal level of responsibility. In John 10:12, Jesus described the difference between a real shepherd and "an hireling." The difference in conduct is vast because one has ownership, the other has not.

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In this verse, Paul spoke of Stachys as "my beloved." This is agapae love. It is love without limitations; love that requires no response. It is to love just because the other person is. Paul was saying that Stachys was such a close friend that he loved him with the love God shared with all human beings. This is a relationship so deep that the preparation to sacrifice is not considered extreme.

And I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; but only they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they were glorifying God because of me. Galatians 1:22, 23

Paul spoke of the churches "in Judea which were in Christ." This identifies a fellowship which is distinguished by the fact that they shared an intimate relationship with Christ. This intimate relationship "in Christ," binds them together in a way they would otherwise not share. There was a commonness in their purpose and a singleness of character that was evident in them all.

In verse 24, within this intimate fellowship, the people in these Judean churches were giving God glory because of the work He had done in Paul's life. We must keep in mind that these same people had lived in terror of Paul because of his aggressive persecution of the church. Nevertheless, they were able to put all that aside and rejoice before the Lord for what God had done in the life of their former enemy. This is love that can see beyond former wrongs to the forgiveness that God creates in the heart of those who share intimate fellowship with Him.

Epaphras my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you. Philemon 23

Paul was a prisoner in Rome at this time. Epaphras was also in prison for his faith in Christ. This verse describes more than just two men being in prison together. They are suffering for their faith. They are bound together by a common pain. Their shared experience of an intimate relationship in Christ is a bond of joy that has deep meaning for all concerned. It is the relationship in Christ that binds them together, not just the pain or the joy. In the midst of the difficulties of Paul's house-arrest, they could still send joyful and meaningful greetings to the good friend, Philemon.

My love be with you all in Christ. Amen. I Corinthians 16:24

To some people, this would seem like the casual close of a personal letter to dear friends. It is far more than that. The word translated "love" is agapae. Again, this is love without limitations or restrictions. Paul is saying that he loves each of them unconditionally. His affection for them is not dependent upon whether they do the things that Paul thinks they should. He will love them if they are obedient or if they rebel. He is also saying that he is committed to them even to the point of real sacrifice. He would not consider his life more precious than theirs. The commitment is not selective. He is prepared to be sacrificed on behalf of everyone and anyone of them. This is the depth of this intimate relationship we share being "in Christ."

Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. II Corinthians 5:19

This verse describes divine action on behalf of His people. Paul presents it as something that God has done on behalf of those who are "in Christ." Paul listed three things that God does on behalf of these people. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. This is not just the physical planet. It describes all creation, including us. It implies that people and the cosmos were previously alienated from God. The word "reconcile" means to restore to favor that which one once enjoyed, but lost. We are not restored to being acceptable, but restored to God Himself. In the Corinthian culture, alienated people were not just cautiously polite to each other. They have nothing to do with each other. They never speak to each other. They would be ashamed to bring such a person into their home. They would rather die than eat one morsel of food with such a person. Restoring is something the offended party does, not the offender. God reconciled, restored to favor the one guilty of the offense.

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God did not count their offenses against them. This is an accounting term. It is to keep track of something the way an accountant keeps track of funds. Paul is saying that God does not keep a precise record of every sin we committed in the past. He does not make it a business of recording every false move that we make. It represents a deep desire to put our sins and past deeds behind us and go on to something better, something that makes us more like Him.

God has committed to us the word of reconciliation. The word translated "committed" is "themenos" and it means "to set something in place the way foundation stones are set." It also means "to deliver something or entrust something to another person." This is just the way God works. He ordains us as partners with Him to fulfill His eternal purpose in redemption.

The word translated "reconciliation" is "katallagae" which means "to reconcile" or "to change an attitude." It is to change from enmity to friendship. It is an acceptance of the provision God has made so that sins can be remitted and the sinner justified in the sight of God. Reconciliation removes the enmity between God and the sinner and leaves no impediment to unity and peace. That is what God has done to bless those "in Christ" in marvelous ways. He has reconciled us to Himself and refused to keep record of our sordid past choosing rather to remember nothing against us. Having experienced this exciting gift, God placed in our care the privilege of sharing, first-hand, this wonderful gift so that others may also be restored to His divine presence.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. Galatians 2:20

In this verse, Paul has given us a glimpse into what is involved when Christ is in us and we are in Him. Being "in Christ" or having Christ in our lives involves being crucified with Him. Paul said, "It is no longer I who live..." Being In Christ ultimately involves sharing the reaction of people to Him as my own. It involves not so much the relinquishing of one's identity as it does placing that identity at Christ's disposal. It is not I who live any longer, but Christ living His life in mine. It requires a surrender of the self in order that His self may hold preeminence in the living of this life. The decisions for this life are His, not mine. The responsibility for the obedient actions in this life becomes His, not mine.

Observe, Paul said, "The life which I NOW live..." This suggests that this life is qualitatively different from what his life once was. He is saying there is an observable difference between his new life in the Spirit and his old life of rebellion. Paul had tried to live a life in keeping with his Jewish faith. People thought of him as a "good Jew." There was, however, something missing. In this verse, Paul identified that his relationship with Christ made the difference. It was his sharing of Christ's crucifixion; it was the presence of Christ living in him that transformed both his life and the responsibility for it. The new life is enabled by faith in Christ whereas the old life was a failing attempt to trust in himself.

It seems astounding that Christ would be willing to take up residence in us. It involves the whole idea of unworthiness. People only invited persons into their tent or home if they were totally at peace. This wording suggests that as Christ takes up residence in me, there is a shift of allegiance. I am no longer the central focus of thought and life. Christ becomes the center of everything in my life.

Paul gives a brief description of who Jesus is and what He is like. In so doing, he described the kind of relationship he has been presenting. Once, the driving passion of Paul's life was the incarceration and punishment of anyone who claimed the name of Christ. Christ came into his life and things were different. He willingly suffered both physical and emotional pain in order to witness the good news to people who were bound in their sin. Jesus is the Son of God. It speaks of His power and His purity. Paul spoke of the fact that Jesus demonstrated His love for every person. His love has no boundaries. It is sacrificial without being deserved.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus... Galatians 3:28

Where Are You ?!

This verse sounds wonderful to us, but it was earth-shaking in that day and culture. He said there is neither Jew nor Greek. Anyone who is not a Jew is considered a "goy," a barbaric Gentile. On the other hand, anyone who is not a Greek is considered an uneducated animal. The line separating these two groups was blurred, in Christ, to the point of extinction.

There is neither slave nor free. The way this is written would be repulsive for a large share of the population. Observe that the slave is mentioned first. The slave must walk three steps behind his master. He must never walk beside or in front of his master. Paul, nevertheless, declared that "in Christ" there are no levels among people.

Paul also said there is neither male nor female. The fact is that "in Christ" there are both males and females. That, however, is not what Paul was talking about. This culture observed serious distinctions between men and women, even in the same family. Women did not inherit, men did. If a husband died, the wife would be under the direction of her son or her brother-in-law. She was not taught the law, or to read and write, but her brothers were. She could not sit beside her husband at the synagogue, but was required to sit behind him and out of sight. She could never be a leader, especially where men were present. Now Paul insists that there is to be no distinction between men and women "in Christ." That divisive wall is gone. Paul however, went a step further in his description.

He said, "You are all one in Christ Jesus. Not only have the ancient barriers been removed, but Paul dared to declare that a single unity has replaced the old separations. "In Christ," a new relationship of mutuality exists while outside that relationship barriers of all kinds divide and separate people from people in a host of artificial ways.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. Galatians 5:6

Paul again, described the unique relationship that exists "in Christ Jesus." He drew a serious contrast to make a point. He said, "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything." Among the Jews, circumcision meant a great deal. It was the sign that a man had entered into the covenant relationship with God. They felt that this gave them a unique status with God. They considered themselves to be the only people of God. This made them feel superior to everyone else. They had been called of God to be the teachers of righteousness for all pagan people. Having contrasted the meaning of circumcision, Paul now drew a second contrast. He contrasted the Jewish reliance on the covenant sign – circumcision – with the life of New Testament faith. Having said both circumcision and uncircumcision meant nothing, Paul contrasted these useless qualities with faith that works through love. The inference is that faith working through love means everything.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Ephesians 2:13

There is a double picture here. Paul drew a picture of a throne room. The king's close advisors sat at his side and around him. Affected subjects who were not granted audience stood at some distance away from the platform on which the king sat. When granted an audience, the subject was permitted to come a bit closer to present his request to the king. If the request appealed to the king, the subject was invited into the immediate presence of the king to discuss the finer details. This is the image Paul used to describe our relationship with God.

Paul drew another picture of the place of the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews thought of themselves as THE people of God. They thought of themselves as sustaining a relationship with God that no other group could possibly attain. They referred to everyone else as "Gentile dogs." Using the same image as previously described, they felt all other peoples – Gentiles – were not even given audience before God. Israel, on the other hand, was granted favored position – "draw near" – which none of the others could anticipate.

In this verse, Paul was speaking to these mostly Gentile Ephesian Christians. He taught that those who are "in Christ" were granted the position of privilege as well. The nationality of a person was unimportant.

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Their being "in Christ" provided a relationship of privilege in God's presence. This was brought about by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Ephesians 3:6

This verse is a clarification of the message of verse five. Paul, like David, was a master of using repetition for purposes of emphasis. Three times in this verse, Paul used the Greek word "sun" which means "with" attached to another word to describe the equal position of Gentile believers with the believing Jews.

Paul spoke of them as "fellow heirs." The Greek word translated "fellow heirs" is "sugklaeronoma". It is a compound word which was formed as follows. "Sug" is a form of the word "sun" which means "with." "Klaeronomos" means "to inherit." The compound word means "to inherit together." This was used in two ways. A person inherits some possession when another person dies. The picture was also used to identify someone to whom something has been assigned by God the possession of which he has not yet received. You see this in Abraham as mentioned in Romans 4:13. It is in Christ in Hebrews 1:2 as well as the poor saints in James 2:5. Frankly, this would be considered anathema by the Jews, but the changeless message of the word of God affirms it continually.

He spoke of the Gentile believers as "fellow members." Paul very often used compound words when a single word would say the same thing, but not as strongly. This is another example. Again, the Greek word "sun" means "with." The Greek word "soma" means "body" or "body part." Paul's message to these Gentile believers would be shocking for the Jews. Paul used the human body as an example. The human body is made up of many different parts. These parts of the body are not all alike. They are, however, equally part of the same body. Paul was saying that "in Christ" there is an equality that is available nowhere else in society.

Paul also spoke of the Gentiles as "fellow partakers of the promise." Yet again, Paul used a compound word to express his intent. The Greek word "sun" means with. The Greek word "metoxos" means "partner" or "fellow." It is "to partake together," "to be joint partners." It is to partake with another. We must keep in mind that the Jews of that day had specific understandings concerning the people with whom they would eat. They would eat only with those who thought as they thought; did as they did. Again, Paul described the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Jews considered themselves to be the only partakers of the covenant of promise. In Christ, however, these divisions have no meaning. The places of Jews and Gentiles as believers are indistinguishable on the basis of national origin.

The emphasis in this verse is that in each of the three statements, Paul used the word "sun" which means "with" or "fellow" to describe the relationship between Jew and Gentile "in Christ." Observe the areas to which Paul added the word "with" to indicate the things Jews and Gentiles share – heirs together, members together, partakers together. Each of these references deals very carefully with the family situation when the leader passes on. Why would Paul use three examples of their mutual relationship? One example could have given the same message. The Old Testament indicates that truth is established at the word of two or three witnesses. Both Jesus and Paul used this approach on numerous occasions.

This would naturally have an effect on both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews outside of Christ would be furious and violently deny what Paul said. Jews in Christ, would recognize that Paul had ushered in a new order. This includes a message that all people in all ages were seen as equals in the sight of God.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, had always been reminded that they were nothing in the sight of God. This would be like an emancipation proclamation for them. It would be nothing but good news for every Gentile. All of this takes place through the good news of the Gospel. The relationship Paul described was breathtaking. In a culture otherwise sharply divided, "in Christ" these dividing designations are meaningless. Where one group claims an exclusive relationship with God, "in Christ" they are indistinguishable from every other person in the fellowship.

Where Are You ?!

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you Ephesians 4:32

This verse is a series of commands. Paul gave three specific parts to this command. He said, "be kind to one another." The word translated "kind" is "chraestoi" and means "to be mild or pleasant." It is "to be kind and benevolent." It is the opposite of harsh or sharp. It was used to describe something that was fit for use. It was used to describe an ox-yoke that fit properly and did not hurt the animal when a heavy load was pulled. Among those who are "in Christ," there is an uncommon gentleness that makes the burdens of life easier to bear.

Paul also told them to be "tender hearted to one another." The word translated "tender-hearted" is a compound word "eusplagchnoi" and is made up in this manner. "Eus" is a Greek word that means "good" or "strong." "Splagnos". The literal meaning is "good or strong bowels." The Greeks thought that the intestinal area of the human body was the seat of violent passions – love and hate. The Jews, on the other hand, thought of the intestinal area as the seat of tender affections – compassion, kindness and tender-hearted benevolence. Paul described the atmosphere that exists among those who are "in Christ." In a world that was then and is now becoming increasingly harsh and abrasive, those "in Christ" demonstrate their likeness to Christ by deep-seated compassion and love from a tender heart expressed toward both friend and foe.

Paul instructed the Ephesian Christians to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave them. David understood this very well. He spoke of God separating our sin from us "as far as the east is from the west." The word translated "forgiveness" is "charidzomenoi" and means "to forgive in a real sense." It means "to show favor to the one who has offended." It means "to grant forgiveness as a free favor to the offending one." Forgiveness, like agapae love, is without condition. Jesus qualified this command. He said, "according to (in the same way) God in Christ forgave you." We are called upon to freely offer each other a God-kind of forgiveness. It involves no preparation for the person to be forgiven. It is freely given with no strings attached. It is totally available, but cannot be deserved. The person who was wronged initiates the process. The wrong is separated from the guilty as far as the east is from the west. Some people erroneously believe that they can forgive without forgetting. It is to be forgotten to the same extent that God "forgets" our sin. In the struggles between Christians and Muslims throughout the world there are some examples of what Paul is speaking. In some lands there are two conflicts in progress at the same time. There is a national conflict that endangers the entire population. There is a religious conflict that pits the Muslims against the Christians. We have heard of Christians who have protected their Muslim neighbors from the annihilation brought about by internal civil strife. This is a relationship God intends to be shared among those who are "in Christ." Imagine what it would be like if we all took this relationship seriously!

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, who are at Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father. Colossians 1:2

Paul greeted the Christians in Colosse. This was a vibrant Christian congregation that met in the home of Philemon. Paul began his letter with a description of their Christian witness. He described their Christian walk in two ways.

First, he said that they were "saints." We have a flawed view of this word. We think of some flawless person of a bygone era who never smiled and prayed night and day. There are really three ingredients in being holy.

There is cleansing. It is purifying those portions of our character that are unlike Christ. It is changing those aspects of our lives that have a damaging effect upon our witness, things that make it difficult for others to see what Christ is like when they look at the way we live.

There is consecration. It is to set apart for God in the same way that the Old Testament sacrifice was sanctified to be used exclusively for God. It also includes the idea of purifying. The Old Testament priest was sanctified, set apart for the service of God. He was available for no other vocation no matter how much

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he might like it or how good he might be at that particular task. In the same way, we must be set apart for whatever service God may have in mind for our lives. We are available for no other use of our time and talent.

There is worship. The cleansing and consecration of our lives cause us to stand in awe before a holy God. It is to be moved to rejoicing in God because of who He is and what He has done in our lives to make us more like Him every day. By worship we do not mean worship services, though these are essential for our spiritual growth. It is a moment by moment response to God's greatness and mercy that causes us not only to stand in awed silence, but to make a growing commitment to do His will and be increasingly more like Him.

Secondly, Paul referred to these Christians as "faithful brethren." This is a way to identify people who can be relied upon all the time. They are people who do what they say they will do. They are full-time believers. They are also full of faith. These are people who act upon the premise that God will always be God. It is the kind of example Abraham was when called upon to sacrifice Isaac. These people have a strong, active relationship with God that shows what Jesus is like. They are family.

In the early church they looked upon each other as brothers. They accepted responsibilities as family members would. They would help each other in trouble. They would come to the aid of a Christian brother when he is under attack. They would share when a brother is in financial need. It is hard to imagine how Paul could have given them a greater compliment than this. That is what it is like to be "in Christ."

The Christian's view of other believers as family does not translate easily into daily experience. Like others, we want Christians of a different background to become what we are if they are going to be accepted as family. Jesus saw our relationship within the body differently and Paul described it quite accurately. The Elliott's were missionaries among the tribes people in the rain forests of South America. A tribesman killed Jim Elliott. The assassin eventually became a Christian. Elizabeth Elliott sought out the man who killed her husband to assure him of her forgiveness. The mutual forgiveness within the body of Christ enabled Mrs. Elliott both to forgive and to love her husband's assassin into the kingdom.

REFLECTIONS

Because God is changeless, He continues to seek an intimate relationship with people who are becoming increasingly like Him. This He will do until our Lord comes to take His bride to His home.

To be "in Christ" is intended to enable the saints to increasingly fulfill their purpose for which they were created – to fellowship with God forever.

Being "in Christ," gives at least an initial glimpse into what God meant at our creation, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." There are not a lot of pieces of information about what heaven will be like. One fact stands out: worship and fellowship will occupy our eternity.

In each of the searches involved in this study, the quality of love emerges repeatedly. It appears to be the basic ingredient in this intimate relationship between God and the people He has adopted into His family. It involves our love for God as much as it involves God's love for us. Love, of course, is verified by our obedience to His commands.

Being "in Christ" is much more than being forgiven. It always moves in the direction of purity and maturity or completeness. It never remains stagnant. It is a relationship that brings joy in the midst of suffering. It is surrounded by thanksgiving.

Our intimate relationships are always on two levels: Our relationship with God in Christ and a parallel relationship with other saints. In both relationships, the core is love.

"In Christ" is a gentle, tender relationship that requires a commonality, an equality among participants. It is essentially a family relationship in which we are always doing Christ's deeds after Him.

Our relationships are positive rather than negative. It focuses on love, encouragement, consolation, fellowship, affection, compassion and many other qualities.

Whatever else being "in Christ" means, it is a simultaneous, intimate relationship between the believers and the Father, Son and Spirit along with other believers.

This intimate relationship consists of an entire lifestyle that is beyond our ability to produce or sustain. It is a process, not an accomplishment.

Holiness is one of the foundations upon which this intimate relationship rests.

There is no "down-side" to this intimate relationship. It is all intended to be positive and beneficial on our behalf.

Believers make up what the New Testament describes as "the bride of Christ." It describes God's most treasured possession. That being the case, we must ask ourselves, "what this means in terms of relationships?"

In human experience, couples who have been married a long time tend to look, think and even talk like each other. Because we are Christ's bride, how does this apply to our relationship to Him?

When focusing our attention on this intimate relationship with God, people often focus exclusively on what it means for us. In view of the passages that have been reported, what does it appear is God's benefit from this relationship? What do you see as his anticipation on our behalf?

We have focused a lot of attention on what happens when we are in Christ and demonstrate our love by our obedience. We must ask ourselves how we should view the opposite situation where obedience is missing?

Adoption, in society, involves a different ingredient in love. Among other reasons, natural-born children are loved because they are in fact part of the life of their parents. They physically resemble the husband or wife or both. The adopted children, however, are loved, because they have a vacancy in their lives. It is not unusual for the adopted child to have a closer, more loving relationship with the parents than the natural child does. In view of our own adoption, what does this say to us?

We are the body of Christ. That means we are inseparably a part of everything He is doing in the world. If I am a part of everything He does, then I must be intimately a part of His attitude toward people as well. Do I love them as He does? On the other hand, if I do not love people as He does, how does that affect my position as part of His body?

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In a body, every tissue responds positively to the direction of the head. This must say something very important about my responses to the head of the body of Christ.

Every part of the body is intricately involved in every other part. One needs to ask if in fact that is the way we see ourselves. What are the implications of this understanding?

There are some in the body of Christ who seem to need to do everything. One wonders how this attitude fits in with the idea of the body.

Again, one of the main ideas that comes to mind about the body of Christ is its unity. A healthy body has unity, a harmony, a singleness of purpose. Just how healthy is the body of Christ as we know it?

We earlier determined that the relationship between the Father and the Son parallels our relationship with Christ. If the Father turned everything over to the Son and the Son is determined to do only the will of the Father, then how does the Son deal with us in terms of authority? What then is the agenda of our authority? The Trinity is involved in the perfecting of our lives. Is there any part of what they are doing in us that does not work toward purity and holiness?

If the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are actively working in our lives to enhance this intimate relationship, then can the word "lonely" have any meaning at all for us?

Like the chick under the mother-hen's wings, abiding is the only safe place to be. Perhaps this is one of the reasons so many believers live in defeat – they have not chosen to abide.

We are commanded to abide in Christ. Could it be that failure to abide would be on a par with failing to love or failing to tell the truth in love?

What might happen if a whole congregation seriously decided to abide in Christ, to live in total harmony with His will and character?

Christians decry the division that often exists in the church. A problem is that no one is surprised when they discover evidence of this division. Have we come to accept a condition that the New Testament rejects? Though it is a common topic in the New Testament, sanctification is not the most talked about subject in the church. In part, at least, this is because of the way the church deals with problems. A couple of generations ago, excesses in the area of the Spirit brought embarrassment to the church. Characteristically, the church deals with problems by silence. The word "sanctification" dropped out of the vocabulary of Sunday school material, Bible studies and in many cases even sermons. How would you describe the effect this has had on our intimate relationship with Christ?

In the New Testament there is a deliberate link between godly living and persecution. Does this indicate that an essential ingredient in an intimate relationship with God is the opposition of the enemy? If so, what does this say about the church in our time?

In each of the nine places in the New Testament that mention "being filled with the Spirit" it was in preparation for a very special form of ministry. It is not uncommon to hear believers talk about being filled with the Spirit. Do you hear them also speak about the preparation for a very special form of ministry?

The relationships to which Jesus invites us are ones that He already sustains with the Father. As a result, He gives us a model to work from. He also gives us a glimpse into the intimate relationship He shares with the Father. In the trinity the work and actions of one are often indistinguishable from the others unless the text clearly describes it. Imagine what the church would be like if our words and actions were indistinguishable from those of the Holy Spirit.

Abiding is more than a comfortable feeling. It is the power that enables all spiritual growth and the bearing of fruit. It is that central relationship that transforms our thinking to share values with the Holy Spirit and make it possible for our requests to be granted.

Just as love is the foundation of our intimate relationship, so obedience is the demonstration of that love to which we are called.

Throughout this study, we walk delicately close to the edge of the human ability to grasp the full meaning of the infinite relationship we study so carefully. In His bountiful mercy, God has gifts of grace for us that far exceed our ability to grasp or comprehend.

REFLECTIONS

Abiding, though presented in terms of a command, is treated by many Christians as an option. To fail to abide must be considered an act of disobedience and nothing less.

Abiding describes a lifestyle of obedience. Thus, it gives one a way to monitor his life. If I live a life of ongoing obedience, then I have evidence of abiding. It is that simple.

Jesus does the things that the Father does. He displays the quality of the Father's character. When people see Him, they have seen the Father. In the same way, we do the things we see Jesus doing, saying and thinking. We reflect the quality of His character. When people see us, they have seen what Jesus is like.

The vine provides the power and identity necessary to bring about fruit. In the same way, God to whom we are bound, provides the energy and identity to bear spiritual fruit. We do not have to accomplish the goal. We cannot even approach it on our own.

Being "in Christ" is not a description of superior spiritual strength. The person "in Christ" possesses no spiritual strength of his own. He draws upon the spiritual strength of the vine, Jesus, to whom He is attached. The vine and the branch are inseparable.

The abiding is always mutual – He is in me and I am in Him.

Abiding in Christ has far-reaching effects on a believer's life. It enables him to bear fruit. It stimulates spiritual growth; it enables answers to prayer. None of these can we do by ourselves.

The mutual-abiding (Jesus in me and I in Him) produces glory for the Father.

Being "filled with the Spirit" like "abiding in Christ," is not a measure of fullness, but rather a description of the level of influence we allow the Holy Spirit to have over our lives.

Every facet of our intimate, personal relationship with God is designed, in His will, to enhance our spiritual walk and strengthen our participation both in His nature and mission.

Some of the most wonderful words in the entirety of Scripture are, "Abide in Me..."

There is a great hymn of the church that speaks volumes concerning the experience of a host of believers. In 1847, an English pastor, Henry F. Lyte, struggled with very poor health. He worked tirelessly in the church he served, despite severe, ongoing health problems. One day as he read the story of the road to Emmaus, the words "abide with us" stuck in his mind. He penned the words of the hymn that touches so many hearts:

*Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee!
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bill's books and Bible Studies are available in print format and can be downloaded from his website:

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Bill Cooper was a pastor for 29 years and has made ten trips to Israel. He is the president and founder of Logos Ministries, Incorporated. Bill has taught in six different countries for 10 years and then for 8 years he directed and taught in the Emmaus Biblical Seminary in Vaudreuil, Haiti.

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Bill presently devotes full time to teaching Inductive Bible Study and writing books on Bible study for the laity.

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