

THE IMPORTANCE OF BELONGING

INTRODUCTION.

Who am I in Jesus? Knowing who we are in Jesus is the key that releases us into the freedom of our true identity and brings healing into the areas of past rejection. An essential part of this understanding is in knowing exactly who we are and what is our **position** in Jesus the Messiah. It's critical that we should know! So how do we find out? Well, we must turn to the Bible to see what it teaches us about what we may call 'positional truth.' It's this theme of 'positional truth' that is developed strongly by Paul – and by others, too – where he tends to use certain terms to explain his meaning, terms such as 'in Christ,' 'in Jesus,' 'in Jesus Christ,' etc., and in our studies, when we find this, we need to stop for a moment to consider just what it is that Paul is saying. You see, these are very significant terms since, when Paul speaks of being '**in**,' he is about to declare something that is defining what is the importance **of** that position. The importance is that he is highlighting our relationship, and our unity, with Jesus the Messiah. We may see that same unity spoken of here very clearly through the words of the apostle John, in 1 John 4:13...

'By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.'

Paul says, over and over again, that in any situation when we are **in** Jesus, because we are now one with Him, then that is exactly how God sees us – not as we actually are, but as we are **in Him**. Do you understand this? Look at 1 John 5:20...

'And we know that the Son of God has come, and He has given us an understanding so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and the everlasting life.'

So! We are **in** Him who is **true**! This is **our** position, spiritually this is where we are, we are **in** Him, a position that has many aspects, and we shall now go on to explore these briefly.

WHAT AM I? I AM.....

a. ...a new creation - 2 Corinthians 5:17...

'So that if any one is in Christ, that one is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.'

This is slightly misleading because of an error in translation. Yes, our human spirit has been given life, it is certainly made new, but our old flesh life is still active, and what this verse actually says, in its original Greek, is that we are **being** made new – a process, where we are being **transformed** from what we were and are until we eventually **conform** in likeness to Him.

b. ...accepted - Romans 8:9-10...

'But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ is in you, indeed the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.'

We are not saved just because we believe, all that believing does is to help us to know that we are saved. We are not saved through repentance, but repentance shows that we have understood what Jesus did for us upon the cross. We come into that place of unconditional acceptance; we come into total justification, through one thing and one thing only – the grace of God made available through the substitutionary death of Jesus. We are therefore acceptable to God, without conditions, simply because Jesus was acceptable, and we are **in** Him.

c. ...treasured - 1 Peter 2:9...

'But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for possession, so that you might speak of the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.'

Many of the implications of this statement are too complex to cover at this point, except to say this. We have been chosen for a purpose, and that purpose is that we should be part of a royal priesthood. There have only ever been two **royal** priests – one was Melchi-Zedek, (who had no beginning and no end), and the other is our Messiah, Jesus. And this is the amazing fact of this verse; we have been chosen to be part of that royal heritage – to rule and to reign, and to offer sacrifices. That makes us very special indeed, and shows that we are treasured in God's eyes.

d. ...unique – Psalm 139:13-16...

'For You have possessed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are marvellous and my soul knows it very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret and

skilfully formed in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo; and in Your book all my members were written, the days they were formed, and not one was among them.'

A psalm of David, someone who came to know a lot about himself, that focuses upon our uniqueness. There is no-one else in the whole world who looks exactly like us, who thinks like us, who laughs like us. Every one of us is utterly unique.

e. ...forgiven – 1 John 2:12...

'I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.'

It is through Jesus that the message of forgiveness is proclaimed, not just to the disciples of His day, but to all of humanity throughout the ages. It is in this context, too, that we find many instances where Jesus Himself declared that men and women were forgiven. We won't go into the scriptures relating to these events but, as we think about them, it is important that we never separate the man, Jesus, from the ministry He brought. Our own personal forgiveness therefore, whether by or through Jesus, arises out of all that He is as well as from all that He does. It rests solely upon the atoning work of Jesus on the cross, and it is a wonderful example of God's grace.

f. ...redeemed – Ephesians 1:7...

'In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.'

We have been bought for a price. What is that price? It is the price that obtained our redemption and it was paid on the cross. And now, having been bought for a price, the deal has been done, we have a new owner, and we are owned by the purchaser. God is into the business of asset stripping for He will keep what He wants to keep but the remainder, that which is of no value to Him, will ultimately be destroyed. God, therefore, in keeping the good, will make it perfect in His own time, it is wholly His and His work of redemption is absolutely total. Sadly, until we are made perfect we remain imperfect and some of the wood, hay and stubble of our previous life will linger on.

g. ...made in His likeness – 2 Corinthians 3:18...

'But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.'

The Jews could not look on the face of Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, and he was obliged to cover it. But all we believers with our faces uncovered can see, as we can see our own faces in a mirror, the glorious promises and privileges of the Gospel, and while we gaze, we look forward to them through hope, and attain them by faith.

h. ...able to comfort others – 2 Corinthians 1:4...

'He comforting us in all our trouble, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in every trouble, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.'

The gifts of grace that are freely available to us through the cross are not just for our own benefit, but just as God has comforted us through the pain of abuse and rejection, has healed us and released us, so it is that we are now equipped to take that same message of infinite grace to those we know who are hurting as we once hurt.

i. ...a victor – 1 John 5:4...

'For everything that has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.'

A popular view among believers is that our new life will deliver us from trouble. But we really need more than that, we need deliverance **in** trouble. Jesus said we **shall** have tribulation, not might have, but remember this, God has not given us overcoming life, what He has given us is **life** that enables us to overcome. Through the cross, and God's grace, we no longer need to try to fight every battle in the hope that we might win, but we fight the battle in the knowledge that the victory has already been won.

LET US CELEBRATE WHAT WE ARE.

Romans 8:17...

'And if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; so that if we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together.'

We gain an inheritance when we suffer with and for Jesus. In the natural world children are heirs of their earthly fathers. Jesus, as the Son of God the Father, is the heir to the Father's kingdom. And now we, who have become children of God, have also attained to that same position through our adoption as sons, for we have become part of God's family. It is because of what Jesus has done for us that we are now joint heirs with Him.

What is it that makes all that so very special? It is this, that the inheritance that is transferred to us, His children, is all the glory and the salvation of the Messianic kingdom. In other words, our inheritance is Jesus Himself and the greatest gift that is now available to us is that He dwells in us. That should really be something to celebrate, and we need to celebrate that in the company of others who share that same inheritance.

WE MUST BUILD GODLY DEFENCES.

As believers there are a number of things I believe we should have learned, and I trust we have taken them on board. You see, we live in a fallen world where Satan is the ruler, he controls all the world's systems, but we should have learned that we don't have to come under his domination. There is a process of transformation taking place in our lives right now as we live more and more in the kingdom of God, and we are learning to be increasingly confident that we have a place of security in His hands. We are learning, whether we are acceptable to others or not, that we are acceptable to Him. It doesn't matter what we've done or where we've been, if we have renounced our old lives we are totally acceptable. It doesn't mean we are altogether free from the past, the 'old man' has not been finally put to death, but we're going the right way. And we have also been learning the importance of making right choices.

One of the most important things we have come to understand, having come to where we now are, must surely be the need to hang on to what God has given us. We must not lose the ground we have taken. He has called us to be in communion with Him and we need to ensure we stay in that place at all times. One thing we can all do each day, need to do every day, at the start of every day, is to place ourselves under the lordship of Jesus – to use the prayer of submission, to give to Him all that we are.

You see, there is a place of security for each and every one of us, which has its roots in God's great love for each one of us. If we come under that love covering we experience God's mercy and remain under God's protection. If we love God we shall want to keep His commandments, as Jesus said in John 15:10, and to abide in that love, so that we keep under the covering of His love. We remain, then, under His protection and His grace is sufficient for us.

He has given us laws, but He didn't establish His laws and commandments to be constrictive or limiting, (after all, He has given us freewill), but to bring us into freedom and to give us a pattern to live our lives by. He doesn't use His laws to judge us or to condemn us, they are there to guide us, to protect us – all because of His great love with which He loves us. In creating Adam and Eve, and thereby all of us, it was for friendship and fellowship and communion so that, through the depth of that relationship, there should be trust and acceptance.

He's not looking for us to try to get our lives right, He doesn't want us to try to work out everything we do, doing it our way and getting it wrong, all He wants is our obedience which, to Him, is as pure gold and better than sacrifice. The fact that God **has** given us laws is a measure of His mercy and His love for us, for His way is the best way, all purposed for our safety and security. He wants us to be in perfect harmony with Him and the way of harmony is to keep His laws and to experience His blessings.

We have, in the past perhaps, established un-godly defences to protect ourselves from the pain of rejection and have, therefore, lived in a world of at least partial un-reality. As we look at ourselves we can say that we have not been true to ourselves, leave alone true to others, but particularly to our creator. And so the barriers we have erected for our own security need to come down for, if we are going to walk in the victory of all that has been achieved, we need to be in communion with each other, that is with fellow believers, at ease with all those around us, and to be one with God.

We no longer need to erect our own defences – we can be free to be ourselves regardless of what there may have been in our past – we **can** be our real selves. For, with Jeremiah we can say, *“O lord, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction.”* And, from Psalm 46:1-5 we see that God is our refuge and strength, an always present source of help...

‘To the Chief Musician. For the sons of Korah. A Song “For the Virgins.” God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear when the earth changes, and when mountains are slipping into the heart of the seas. Let its waters roar and foam; let the mountains shake with the swelling of it. There is a river, its channels gladden the city of God glad, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her at the turning of the morning.

So how do we set about building our Godly defences?

1 – By being vulnerable to God...

- a. To begin with we need to put God first where our trust is concerned. We learn from John 2:24-25 that Jesus put His trust in no man...

'But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men and did not need that anyone should testify of man. For He knew what was in man.'

That doesn't mean He suspected them of anything, neither was He bitter towards them, nor did He despair over them. Rather it was because He placed His trust in God's grace and what that grace could do for man. When we have learnt that level of trust we shall be able to be absolutely honest with God, and be real about how we feel. And that's so important, to be able to tell Him, to be able to express to Him the pain we feel for all that we have experienced and to acknowledge the sin we have harboured through our own suspicion, bitterness and despair. It will almost certainly be the case that we shall be rejected again, by someone or other, somewhere, but if we are trusting in God's abundant grace and mercy there will be no need for that rejection to once again arouse those deep, bitter feelings, or cause us to react badly, or for us to try to hide behind our own barriers of self defence. If our trust in God is such that we know that He accepts us just as we are, because of who we are in Jesus, no more is there any need for us to withdraw into ourselves.

- b. As and when the rejection we fear comes again, whether from someone very near to us, or someone in the work place, or even in a church situation, we need to turn to God to allow Him to touch the pain. It's here, following the pain of rejection, that we need to clearly distinguish between the soul and the spirit. The hurt is in the soul, that part which needs the healing, but, as believers, God already dwells within our spirits, which are therefore whole, although maybe bruised and damaged, and He is ready to radiate in and through our souls to bring us healing. We have to allow Him to do that. No matter the intensity of the pain, as long as we live there will never be more of Him available for us than when the pain is at its worst.
- c. Keep short accounts with God about our behaviour. We must learn to recognise when our reactions to rejection aren't entirely Godly. This is where confession comes in, for it is as we confess our sin that the barriers that prevent us becoming the mature disciples we were created to be come falling down.

d. But there will be times when, on our own, we may find it difficult to understand what is blocking us from moving into the freedom we long for, much less how to remove it. It's at such moments that we need others to come alongside, to help us receive God's healing. This is where we need to be teachable and willing to receive correction. In this there must be a willing humility for, to be true disciples, we must accept discipling. As Oswald Chambers, in 'My utmost for His highest', says,

'Our work as ministers begins where God's grace has laid the foundation; we are not to save souls, but to disciple them. Salvation and sanctification are the work of God's sovereign grace; our work as His disciples is to disciple lives until they are wholly yielded to God.'

Are we willing to submit our lives in trust to someone else who truly has our best interests at heart?

e. We need to be continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. The only protection we have against the false is that which is true – and Jesus is the truth, as well as the way and the life. And the Holy Spirit has been sent to reveal that truth to us. It is the name of Jesus that contains the power to heal, and all believers may know that, as they learn to obey Him and to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. When move in the realm of the spiritual, manifesting the gifts of the Spirit, we are empowered by the Spirit, and we must cease from trying to do things in our own strength by permitting the Holy Spirit to have His way in our lives. As Paul sums all that up, in Romans 8:10-11.

f. Be open to receive God's love at all times. Experiences may often seem to drive a wedge between us and God but there is absolutely nothing that can block the love of God for us, and Paul expresses that so well in Romans 8:38-39...

'For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

The foundation of our faith is in the grace of God manifested in His love for us through the cross of Calvary, which we cannot earn, we can only receive.

2 - Be prepared to do our part...

a. In Matthew 18:21-22 Simon Peter asks Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother – by that meaning his fellow men. We know Jesus' response. There are two

blockages that prevent wholeness in Jesus – they are the failure to forgive others, and to receive forgiveness for ourselves. We need to give this a great deal of thought because of the importance placed on forgiveness by Jesus. Unless we forgive the sins of others towards us we cannot be forgiven, so, as we are restored through God's grace we need to reflect that grace towards others in both our willingness, and our determination, to forgive. Our forgiving, even when that forgiveness is not deserved, cuts through the cords of bitterness and resentment and breaks the cycle of guilt and shame.

b. Romans 12:18 contains a call for us to live at peace with all men, as far as is possible. As depends on us. There is a call on us, as far as **we** are able, to seek reconciliation with our brothers and sisters. Jesus Himself said that if a brother has anything against us we must first be reconciled to that brother (or sister). This is not an option, neither is it between you and God for, although I may be wrong, I'm making the assumption that the issues between you and God have been dealt with, otherwise you wouldn't be here. No, this is speaking of human relationships and the need for peace in those relationships. It may be something with Mum or Dad, with a husband or wife, with our children, or with any other human being. We take the wind out of the enemy's sails through unilateral forgiveness and through seeking reconciliation.

c. Genesis 45:1-7 is a part of the story of Joseph, in which we have the account of a man who learned how to deal with the rejection of his brothers. Through most of the story Joseph bears a grudge, quite deserved, against his brothers, and so, sometimes, do we as the result of events and experiences in our lives. But the end of the story, and it is always the end that is important, reveals that there welled up within Joseph such a depth of emotion that the sound of his weeping filled the palace. And he could not hold on to his bitterness, but released it as he forgave his brothers for all that had been done to him, in the process stepping into liberation and freedom. For, as Joseph later said, *'But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.'* Who knows, if we are willing, what God can do with all our pain of the past. As Philip Yancey wrote, in his book, *'What's so amazing about grace,'* the only thing harder than forgiveness is the alternative.

d. Romans 12:2...

'And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God.'

It's in our thoughts that the battles are won or lost. The battle for our souls takes place in our minds, as it says in James 1:15. We need to hold our thoughts captive to focus on the things of God, and not on the things of the flesh or of this world.

e. Ephesians 6:18...

'...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching to this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.'

We must keep open the communication channels with God at all times. But consider this. As we go on in prayer we may find that our obedience to God will cost us, and maybe others, too, rather more than we had expected. You see, it is impossible to pray effectively unless we are absolutely sure of God, and the greatest hindrance to our relationship with God in this area is the prayer of the **soul** rather than the **Spirit**. When our sympathy, or our intolerance, for others colours our intercession the vital connection with God is lost. The essential key to intercession is identification, and this is true identification, not sympathy for the needs of those for whom we pray, however important we may feel that to be, but with God's interest and compassion for them. When we are interceding it is unlikely that we shall have either the time or the inclination to be very bothered about ourselves, for we shall be fully identified with God's interests in the lives of others. But we may pray and supplicate for ourselves, wrestling before God with those things that are a hindrance in our lives – fear, sickness, relationships, etc., and we need to keep our guard up in these areas, discerning what is His permissive will for us so that we distinguish what is His order, *'for all things work together for good to them that love God.'*

f. Referring back to Romans 12:2, we need to work at changing our old, wrong, habits and belief systems. You see, habits are not something we are born with, we have formed habits on the basis of what our experiences have shown us. The same applies to belief systems. I believe this or that about myself because that is what circumstances have led me to believe. We need to change all these things in the light of the new life that God has placed within us. It will be our old habits and belief systems that will cause us to hang back when God asks us

to do something that may be utterly foreign to what we have been used to. Our reactions will be the same, time and time again, until we make a determined effort to break free. It will be through the renewing of our minds that we can activate our wills to destroy the old ways and move into the new.

g. Proverbs 7:6-27...

'For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice, and I saw among the simple ones, among the youths, a young man with no understanding, passing through the street near her corner. And he went the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night. And, behold, there a woman met him, with the dress of a harlot and a guarded heart. She is loud and stubborn; her feet do not stay in her house; now she is outside, now in the streets, and lies in wait at every corner. And she caught him and kissed him, and with a hard face she said to him, I have peace offerings with me; today I have paid my vows. so I came out to meet you, earnestly to seek your face, and I have found you. I have decked my bed with coverings, with striped cloths of Egyptian linen. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning; let us delight ourselves with caresses. For my husband is not at home, he has gone on a long journey; he has taken a bag of silver with him and will come home at the day of the full moon. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goes after her immediately, like an ox goes to the slaughter, or like a fool to the correction of the stocks; until a dart strikes through his liver; as a bird hastens to the snare and does not know that it is for his soul. And now listen to me, sons, and attend to the words of my mouth. Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not go astray in her paths. For she has cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the rooms of death.

Take a careful look at this. It is a parable of seduction, how a young man fell for the attractions of a harlot, and paid the price. And this is one of the ways where Satan tempts us – through the desires of the flesh, placing before us anything from sex and pornography to chocolate and candies, to money, to shopping, and so on. The flesh is one of the main areas of warfare and we need to guard ourselves against the demands of the flesh, putting it to death, as it were, just as Paul says, in Galatians 2:20...

'I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf.'

h. Matthew 4:4... Jesus said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but **by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**'" In Romans 11 Paul speaks of believers in Jesus as being part of an olive tree, branches that have been grafted in. In Biblical idiom the

olive tree is the symbol of fruitfulness, virility and life, which can be summarised as blessings. That's just an aside. What I want to bring out here is that the olive tree, growing in dry and arid conditions, requires a deep root system in order to withstand the strong winds and to draw nourishment from the soil. The Bible contains many warnings about deception and false doctrine that will be prevalent in the last days and we need God's complete revelation to strengthen the roots of our faith both in our theology and in our daily walk. If we see ourselves as part of that olive tree it is the Spirit of God that is the life-giving sap bringing nourishment from the roots in the Old Testament to us, the fruit bearing branches. The Bible is the written word of God, the *logos*, and it is this word that is able to build up within us a strong and secure structure of faith as we read it, hear it, and apply it. But the Word of God is also a title given to Jesus our Messiah, for example in John 1, so we can derive that both are the authoritative and perfect revelation of God. Each is in perfect agreement with the other, as we see from Jesus' confrontation with the devil. The Bible perfectly reveals Jesus as the Son of God and the saviour of the world, while Jesus is the perfect fulfilment of all that the Bible contains. In this sense, then, it must follow that our relationship with the Bible should be the same as our relationship with Jesus, just as He said in John 14:23. The special distinguishing mark of a true disciple is that he keeps the word of Jesus, that in keeping the word the disciple reveals his love for God, and this will bring about God's favour for the disciple. It is through the word that Jesus manifests Himself to us, and the Father and the Son together establish an enduring home with us. We need, therefore, not just to read but to consume the word so that it lives within us.

i. Colossians 3:16-17...

'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And everything, whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.'

We are exhorted, through many scriptures, to give thanks to God and to express our gratitude to Him for all the benefits we enjoy, for His blessings and for His righteous judgements. We are also to thank him for wisdom and might, for enabling us and for giving us the victory.

j. Ephesians 6:10-18, 1 Peter 5:8... From the moment we became believers we found ourselves in a battle situation. Perhaps you noticed that. In a war situation one who fights for the right does so to achieve a goal...Philippians 3:14. As believers we need to be constantly restating to ourselves what is the purpose of our lives. The natural end for the unredeemed man is not the health, and wealth and happiness that so many seek after. Quite the opposite. The problem for man is that he has too many affinities, too many desires, and a great deal of effort is dissipated in achieving, if possible, the wrong goals.

But for the believer, the one who has not only recognized but has also received from God, the one thing that matters above all else is the total acceptance of the God who will make him holy. At all costs he must be in a right relationship with God. But this can place us in a quandary, because we're still human. Wonderful, my spirit is renewed, I am born again, my spirit is alive to God! But...my body is still the same old body, my soul has not been changed and so the 'old man' has not yet been eradicated. The soul, the 'us' bit of our tripartite being, is made up of our mind, our will and our emotions, and it becomes the battleground for the fight between our 'old man' and our 'new man.'

Any, or all of our three soul-parts, our mind, will and emotions, can be controlled by either the 'old man' or the 'new man.' The objective of the 'old man' is to work through either the mind - or the emotions **and** the mind - to induce us into making the wrong choices in the exercise of our will, thus causing us to oppose the will of God for our lives, and so we fall into sin. On the other hand the 'new man' gives a restored ability to be able to discern God's law - it's been there all the time but only now can we see it. The situation is that, through the new birth, we can still sin, but if we obey the life of God within us **we do not need to sin.** We have the power to choose. The choice is, do we bring our wills into line with God's will, or do we submit to the flesh, the world or the devil.

k. Acts 2:42-47...

'And they were continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship and in the breaking of the loaves, and in prayers. And fear came on every soul. And many wonders and miracles took place through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things common. And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. And continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they shared food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising

God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.'

There are so many elements contained within these verses but the one key issue is 'fellowship.' There is a need for togetherness, and that need is going to increase as the 'institutionalised' Church slips deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of deception and apostasy. Not to mention the coming times of tribulation where I believe God is already preparing the true Church to go 'underground.' There seem to be four important aspects here – right doctrine, true fellowship, the sharing of resources, and prayer. What is described within the verses we have just looked at is something most of us long for within our churches. We are not speaking of an hour on Sunday but something that is daily. We are not speaking of a gathering that is considered irrelevant by the majority, but something that finds favour with all the people. We are not speaking of a congregation that is generally declining but of one that is being added to daily by those who are being saved. Yes, we are enjoined to gather together, but the purpose of gathering together is the building up of the body until it comes into the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the fullness of Jesus Himself. We are talking here of corporateness, of every member fulfilling his or her role, the exercising of the gifts and the freedom to minister. We are not New Testament believers, we are whole Bible believers, but Oh! that some of the characteristics of the New Testament church might be reflected in the body today.

Prayer:

Father, keep me from fighting Your battles in my own strength. Help me to triumph over the enemy, not through my own striving, but by keeping my eyes upon You. May You be glorified in the midst of Your church. Enable us all to exalt and glorify your name in every situation and to never cease from giving You thanks.

And now, may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make me complete in every good work to do His will, working in me that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Edward Thomas