

The Christian's God

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A personal God

Getting the right idea

As people think about the physical world around them, they may conclude that there is a Creator-God who is intelligent and powerful. As they think about their own awareness of right and wrong, they may conclude that there is a moral God to whom they are answerable. But God has not left people with only this vague or general knowledge of himself. He made himself more fully known through events that took place in history, and that revelation is recorded in the Bible. Through the Bible people most clearly learn what God is like.

Although he is invisible, God is not some impersonal 'force' or abstract 'principle'. He is a personal God; that is, he has personal awareness, knowledge, power, will and feelings. Men and women also have these characteristics, because they are made in God's image. The difference is that in men and women they have been spoiled by sin, whereas in God they exist in perfection.

God's love and anger, for example, show something of the character of the personal God, but they are not the same as the love and anger that people in general display. Human language is inadequate when used of God, because it cannot properly describe a person who exists eternally and has no physical form. To help overcome this inadequacy, the Bible may at times speak of God as if he had human features such as arms, ears and eyes, but it does not expect readers to understand such statements literally.

Knowing a person

Human beings may not be able to understand everything about God, but that should not stop them from enjoying a

relationship with him. Young children have only a limited understanding of the business and social matters that concern their parents, but that does not stop them from enjoying a relationship with them. The parents may use simple language to try to explain such things to their children, in spite of the children's inability to understand them fully. Likewise God graciously tells people about himself through the Bible; but much has to remain untold, because the human mind does not have the capacity to understand it.

The Bible therefore does not attempt to give a complete description of God. Also, it prohibits the use of anything in nature or anything of human creation as a physical representation of God. Such things lead only to a wrong understanding of God, and this in turn produces wrong attitudes and behaviour in those who worship him.

What sort of God

At the beginning of ancient Israel's existence as God's people, Moses asked for a name of God that would give the people an idea of his character. The name that God gave was 'I am who I am' (sometimes shortened to 'I am'), or 'I will be what I will be' (Exodus 3:14).

In giving this mysterious name, God taught his people more about himself. He showed that although he would not satisfy mere curiosity about him, he would never fail them. They could always depend on him to do what he, in his perfect wisdom, knew to be best. He was independent, eternal, unchangeable, always active and always present. He would be to his people whatever he chose to be, and they were to trust him.

Israel's language was Hebrew, and in that language the word translated 'I am' is related to the word 'Yahweh', the name by which Israelites already knew God. God's 'I am' statement was an explanation of what the name 'Yahweh' should have meant to his people. The ancient Israelites developed such a reverence for this name that they never spoke it. They used another word

instead, with the result that English-speaking people took some time to find the right pronunciation of the word. It has traditionally been translated 'Jehovah', though many English Bibles avoid the pronunciation problem by using the word LORD (in capital letters).

But people are not dependent solely on mysterious names for their understanding of God. The Bible is full of statements and stories that clearly show the sort of person God is.

God is the source of all things, yet he himself has no source. He is without beginning and without end. Nothing can add to him or take away from him. He is under obligation to no one, he needs no one, he depends on no one and he is answerable to no one. Whatever he does, he does because he chooses to, not because he is required to; though he always acts in a way that is consistent with his character of perfect goodness.

Responsive to human behaviour

Although God is great beyond the limits of a world of time and space, he is involved in the day-to-day affairs of that world. He is interested in the lives of ordinary men and women. He has given them freedom to make their own decisions, but he maintains his absolute authority and directs human history towards its final destiny.

People rebel against God, but their rebellion does not destroy his authority. God allows evil to happen, though he never allows it to go beyond the limits that he has determined. Even if he uses people's wrongdoing to bring about certain events, the wrongdoers are not excused. They are still responsible for their actions. Peter blamed the rebellious Jerusalem Jews for Jesus' death, saying, 'You killed him by letting sinful people crucify him'. But in the same sentence he says that this was 'in accordance with God's own plan' (Acts 2:23). God is always in ultimate control.

The world is in a state of constant change, and God is responsive to its changing circumstances. He may be moved to

compassion when he sees suffering, or moved to anger when he sees evil. He may change his treatment of people from blessing to judgment when they defy him, or from judgment to blessing when they turn to him. This does not mean that events take God by surprise so that he has to revise his plans. He always knows the end from the beginning, and he always bases his plans on his perfect knowledge and wisdom.

When, therefore, the Bible says that God does not change, it does not mean that he is a giant robot driven on according to fixed laws. It means that in his character he does not change. His qualities and values do not change. He can neither increase nor decrease in power, knowledge, love, wisdom or justice, because he possesses all these things in perfection. God is consistent in all that he is and all that he does. People can trust him fully, knowing that he will always be true to his perfect character. He will do only what is right.

God as Father

When people respond to God's love by receiving the forgiveness and life he offers through Jesus Christ, they find that they come into a special relationship with him. The almighty God is now their Father.

In a general sense God is the Father of all humankind, because he is the source of all life, the Father of the universe. But this is not the usual meaning when the Bible speaks of God as Father. Rather he is Father only to his own people. In the Christian era this means that he is Father especially to those who have turned from their sins to him and accepted the salvation he offers through Jesus. (An even higher sense in which God is Father is as Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this will be discussed in the next chapter.)

To illustrate that God was their Father, the early Christians used the picture of a common first century practice known as adoption (which was not the same as adoption today). A wealthy man without children would carefully choose someone and make

him his son, so that this son could become the next head of the family, receive the family inheritance and carry on the family name. A person was very privileged if someone chose him in this way and gave him the status of a true son.

This pictures what God has done for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ. He has made them his sons and daughters, giving them the status and dignity of responsible people who can share his interests.

Another illustration used by the early Christians was that of new birth. People are sinners and therefore are spiritually dead, unable to give themselves spiritual life. God, however, can save them from this hopeless condition by forgiving their sins and giving them the life that he desires for them. The Bible says of those early Christians that their spiritual new birth occurred when they 'received Jesus and believed in him'. They became God's children because God was the one who gave them life. God himself was their Father (John 1:12-13).

A triune God

Three-in-one and one-in-three

Although there is only one God, that God is a trinity. The word 'trinity' comes from the word for 'three', but any attempt to define it in relation to God is difficult and dangerous. This is because human language is not capable of explaining the uniqueness of the divine trinity fully or exactly. Within the one personal God there are three personal distinctions, which, for lack of a better word, are called persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of these persons is fully God, yet there is only one God, not three. He is a triune God – three-in-one and one-in-three.

Our understanding of the Trinity is tied in with the Bible's record of God's dealings with the human race. God did not make known his truth to humankind in one great initial revelation, nor did he reveal it in the form of abstract teachings. He revealed it stage by stage and in a way that was related to people's needs. At each stage the truth he made known was relevant to circumstances in the lives of those who received it. In this way God developed his plan of salvation and brought it to finality in Jesus.

In Old Testament times, however, Jesus had not yet come, and therefore there was no immediate need to teach people about the Trinity. The emphasis in Old Testament times was on the oneness of God. Because the Israelites lived among nations who believed there were many gods, they were reminded constantly that there is in fact only one God, and he is a unity. With the fuller knowledge we now have through the New Testament, we may look back and see suggestions of the Trinity in the Old Testament. But our clearer knowledge of the Trinity comes mainly through the life and work of Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that the God of the Old Testament was different from the God of the New. It does not mean that a God

who was previously 'one' now divided into three. God has always existed as a Trinity. The new element in the New Testament is the *revelation* of the Trinity, not the Trinity itself.

Made clear through Jesus

Jesus Christ not only made God known to the human race; he himself became one of the human race. When people saw Jesus, they saw God. Yet there was a mystery, because although God was physically present in the world in the person of Jesus, in another sense God was not physically present in the world. Jesus explained this apparent contradiction by pointing out that he was God the Son, and the one from whom he came was God the Father. The two were distinct, yet they were inseparably united. 'The Father and I are one,' said Jesus (John 10:30).

There is no suggestion that God the Father existed first and God the Son came into existence later. Both are God, and therefore both have existed eternally, but they have existed in this relationship of Father and Son. The Son began his human existence at a certain time in history, but as God he has always existed. Because he is both divine and human, he is the only one who can truly make God known to humankind, and the only one through whom humankind can be brought back to God.

Having become one of the human race, Jesus then gave the additional revelation that there was a third person in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit. As his crucifixion drew near, Jesus explained to his disciples that after his resurrection he would return to his Father. But he told them also that, although he no longer would be physically in the world, he would still be with them. His Spirit would come to dwell in them, and give them the sort of help and teaching that he had given them. They had known God as the Father, they had seen him as the Son, and now they would have him living in them as the Holy Spirit.

No change in God

Before he returned to his Father, Jesus told his disciples to go and make more disciples, and to baptize those new disciples

'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). By this statement Jesus showed his disciples that the God they were beginning to understand as 'three-in-one and one-in-three' was the same God as their ancestors worshipped as 'one'. The disciples were Jews, and in Jewish thought the name represented the person. Jesus here spoke of 'the name' (singular), indicating one God, but at the same time he showed that this God existed as three personal distinctions.

As a God-fearing Jew, Jesus gave his total allegiance to the one and only true God, and he taught his followers to do likewise. In Old Testament times God's people worshipped him under the name 'Yahweh'; in New Testament times they worshipped him under the name 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. The God who is 'one' is also a Trinity.

What the early Christians understood

The New Testament writers seem to have had no difficulty with Jesus' teaching. They accepted both the Old Testament revelation of the oneness of God and Jesus' revelation of the Trinity. They never tried to define or prove the Trinity, but assumed it always. Since the God they worshipped had given his Son to die for them and given his Spirit to indwell them, the only way they thought of God was as a Trinity.

In keeping with the teachings of Jesus, the New Testament writers show that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully and equally God. No one is inferior to, or superior to, the other. But in their operations there is a difference. The Son is willingly subject to the Father, as seen in Jesus' obedience to his Father. The Spirit is willingly subject to the Son, as seen in his work of reminding the disciples of the things Jesus taught them.

Nevertheless, there is no suggestion that the work of God is divided among three persons. The unity between Father, Son and Spirit means that all three are active in all the work of God. The New Testament writers may not have understood fully the divine activity within the Trinity, but they knew the character of the

God who was at work. He was a triune God and he was changing people's lives through the message they preached.

Why the subject is important

The reason Christians try to understand the Trinity is not to satisfy their curiosity or work out a scheme to explain how God exists or operates. The New Testament writers never attempted a theoretical analysis of God, though they constantly sought to understand more of his character and activity. Christians should always want to learn about God, because their new life in Christ depends on God being the sort of person he is.

Only because God is the sort of God he is (a Trinity), is the salvation of men and women possible. The word 'father' has to do with origins, and salvation comes from the Father. But the Father works through the Son. God made himself known to the world through Jesus, who carried out God's work of salvation. The Spirit, through whom God's power works in the world, applies the benefits of Jesus' work to people's lives.

Paul, a leading teacher in the early church, summarizes this in Titus 3:4-7. Salvation, he points out, originated with God the Father: 'When the kindness and love of God was revealed, he saved us'. He goes on to say that it was 'through Jesus Christ our saviour', through the Son, that God carried out this work. And the benefits of that work are applied to believers 'through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life.'

Just as God's salvation comes to people because God is a Trinity, so people can come to God because he is a Trinity. Their approach to God is by the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Even the most basic of all Christian exercises, prayer, is possible only because God is a Trinity. The Holy Spirit within believers helps them to pray, the Father in heaven is the one to whom they pray, and the Son is the heavenly mediator who supports their requests.

God in human form

The greatest miracle

Central to Christian faith and practice is the fact that in Jesus Christ the eternal God became a human being. This must surely be the miracle of all miracles. Little wonder, therefore, that the way it came about also involved a miracle – the supernatural work of God within the body of the virgin Mary, so that the child born to her, though having no human father, was fully human.

Jesus was not just an ordinary person whom God adopted as his Son, but also a unique person who was actually God's Son. He himself was God, and as the Son he existed in a relation with the Father that no other creature could share.

Like others, yet different

In becoming a human being, the Son of God willingly sacrificed the supreme glory of heaven and took instead a humble place among God's creatures on earth. In doing so, he accepted the limitations of such an existence. This means not that his divinity was in any way reduced, but that he accepted the limitations of living like other people in a world of imperfection and suffering. Yet there was no imperfection in Jesus himself. The human nature common to people in general is infected by sin from birth, but Jesus' human nature was not.

Though a man, Jesus was also God. In him the human and divine natures existed together, without either one lessening the other. They were complete, united and inseparable. He still had divine power and knowledge, and he exercised those rights of forgiveness and judgment that belong to God alone. At the same time he was fully human. He experienced tiredness, hunger and thirst. He showed normal human emotions and reactions such as astonishment, joy, disappointment, pity, sorrow and anger.

There was no element of magic in the way Jesus lived. He never used his divine powers to avoid the inconveniences and difficulties of life. If he wanted to go from one place to another, he travelled the same as others and put up with the weariness of the journey. If he wanted information, he asked questions. He used his super-natural powers only as his Father permitted and always to help others, never to benefit himself.

Jesus experienced the same sorts of troubles and temptations as other people, but he never sinned. He was therefore not under God's judgment and so was able to be the substitute for those who were. Peter, looking back on the life of Jesus, said, 'He committed no sin . . . He himself carried our sins in his body on the cross' (1Peter 2:22-24).

Jesus Christ the Lord

The early Christians were very clear in their understanding that the purpose of Jesus' coming was to die, and the purpose of his death was to save sinners. An early Christian summary of belief was, 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1Timothy 1:15). This fact had been revealed before Jesus' birth, through the name God chose for the child. 'Jesus', though a common Jewish name, had its origins in the Hebrew expression, 'Yahweh saves'. It was therefore a fitting name for the person whom God sent as his saviour for the world.

From Old Testament times the Jews had looked for a great king, one like David, who would lead Israel to national glory. Israelite kings were often referred to as 'the anointed', because they were officially appointed to their position by the ceremony of anointing. Because the Hebrew word for 'anointed' was 'messiah', this longed-for kingly descendant of David was called the Messiah. In New Testament times Greek was the common language, and the Greek word equivalent to 'Messiah' was 'Christ'. The word was later used as a personal name for Jesus.

Jesus was the promised Messiah, but he rarely referred to this aspect of his mission. Most Jews had a wrong understanding

of the Messiah and his kingdom, and Jesus did not want to attract the wrong kind of following. People wanted a political leader who would overthrow Roman power and bring in an independent Israelite kingdom of peace and prosperity. Jesus was concerned with releasing people from the power of sin and bringing them into the kingdom of God. There they would come under God's rule and authority of God, exercised through Jesus Christ.

The title that the early Christians most commonly used of Jesus was 'Lord'. This indicated the sovereign power of Jesus Christ as God and King. It was also the equivalent of the Hebrew word 'Yahweh', the ancient Israelites' special name for God.

The King and his kingdom

Jesus' work of preaching, teaching and helping the needy was connected with the coming of God's kingdom. That kingdom was concerned with God's rule in people's lives, not with political revolution.

The miracles of Jesus showed that the power of God's kingdom was working through him to conquer evil and free people from its power. His preaching urged people to enter God's kingdom by turning from their sin and humbly submitting to God's rule. In this way they would receive the kingdom's benefits in forgiveness of sin and new life. Many of Jesus' parables showed that although the kingdom of God had in one sense arrived, in another sense it had not. It had not yet been forced upon the world with irresistible power.

During Jesus' lifetime his disciples found his teaching on the kingdom hard to understand. They did not realize that the king had first to fulfil the role of a servant. Jesus had to do, perfectly and completely, the work that God had given him to do; and that work involved suffering and death.

Only by the sacrifice of himself could Jesus deal with sin conclusively and so release people from its power. His devotion to his task was total, even to death; and for this reason God 'raised him from death and gave him glory' (1Peter 1:21). The

resurrection of Jesus proved that he had finished perfectly the work he had come to do. He was the triumphant Lord, Messiah, King and Saviour.

With the resurrection of Jesus, the previously confused disciples became clear-sighted and confident. They knew that the resurrected Jesus was more than just a dead man come back to life. Although he was still a man, his human existence was now beyond the reach of death. It was no longer bound by former limitations. In a way beyond human understanding, Jesus was glorified in his Father's presence. Even when he disappeared from his disciples for the last time, they knew he was still alive and helping them, and one day would return.

In raising Jesus to the place of highest honour, God showed him to be King. He also gave the assurance that one day 'all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees and openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord' (Philippians 2:10-11). The day will come when God will impose his rule upon a rebellious world through his King, Jesus, but first he gives people the opportunity to repent. That is why Christians proclaim the good news of his kingdom. The repentant can enter that kingdom now and begin immediately to receive its blessings.

Final victory

The New Testament writers are of one mind in asserting that at some time known only to God, Jesus will return. Their assurance is based on the clear promises of Jesus himself.

Although Jesus' return will be spectacular, we must not think of it as something unrelated to the events of his life recorded in the Bible. On the contrary it is the event that will bring to a climax all that Jesus achieved through his life, death and resurrection – the judgment of sin, the conquest of death, the giving of eternal life, the healing of the physical world and the establishment of God's kingdom.

Jesus' coming will bring the present world's history to an end and introduce a new age, the age of the kingdom of God.

The Bible does not satisfy our curiosity by giving a timetable of events, but it leaves us in no doubt of certain things that will take place. Among those things will be the resurrection of the dead and final judgment.

In the days of his earthly life, Jesus had refused to seek the kingship of the world by violent or political means. But, because he sacrificed himself to save the world, that kingship will now be his. Through him God will rule, for judgment and for blessing. If people have refused to accept the salvation Jesus made available, they will find no way of escaping the penalty of sin. But if they have trusted in Jesus as the bearer of sin's penalty for them, they will face the day of judgment with confidence. This does not mean, however, that they will escape all judgment; for they are still answerable to God for their behaviour as believers.

Therefore, while Christians look forward to meeting Jesus, their expectation of that meeting causes them to be careful the way they live now. Since Jesus will reappear when least expected, they should be ready always.

Arising out of Jesus' return will be a new age, a new world, a whole new kind of existence, where God's people will live with him in the full enjoyment of the life Jesus made possible for them. As the Son, Jesus had been entrusted by the Father with the task of restoring all things to a state of perfect submission to the sovereign God. With the conquest of evil and the restoration of all things to God, the Son's work will be finally fulfilled. God will be everything to everyone.

God within his people

More than an impersonal power

After Jesus' resurrection and return to the Father, the early Christians experienced a number of significant changes. One of these was that God's Spirit now indwelt them in a way they had not known previously.

Jesus had promised that his physical departure from the world would not disadvantage God's work. Quite the opposite. Through the Holy Spirit, the same Jesus would now live within his people – not just those who had lived with him in Palestine, but every person in every era and every place who turned to him in faith and repentance. Jesus' presence in the world had previously been limited to first century Palestine, but through the Holy Spirit that presence would now become timeless and worldwide.

Through Jesus, people began to have a new understanding of the Spirit of God. In former times, when people spoke of the Spirit of God they were probably thinking of God's living and active power, not of a specific person within a triune Godhead. They probably had no understanding of the Spirit of God as a person within the Trinity, just as they had no understanding of the Son of God as a person within the Trinity. But when on occasions they saw God's power working through selected people for certain tasks, they rightly saw this as God's Spirit, not as some merely human ability.

With the coming of Jesus Christ, things became clearer. Jesus talked about the Spirit and demonstrated the Spirit's power. He lived his daily life by the unceasing work of the Spirit through him. People began to see that the Spirit was more than a power; he was a person. He could teach, hear, comfort and help. Jesus explained that the unique relation between the Father

and the Son extended to include the Spirit. There was a unity between Father, Son and Spirit, but at the same time a distinction.

Jesus' provision for his people

Although the New Testament era may have brought a change in people's understanding of the Spirit, the Spirit himself did not change. He had always been fully God and fully personal. But when God physically entered the world in the person of Jesus Christ, the relation between God and the people of the world could never be the same again.

Those who lived with Jesus could receive God's help and teaching easily: they only had to ask Jesus. Soon, however, Jesus was to leave them. Therefore, to ensure that they continued to receive God's help, Jesus promised them 'another Helper, who will stay with you for ever, namely, the Spirit' (John 14:16-17). A sentence or two later he said, 'You will not be left all alone; I will come back to you' (John 14:18). Jesus would come to his people in the person of the Holy Spirit; or, to put it another way, the Holy Spirit would represent the presence of Jesus to his people. The Spirit would give them the same help as Jesus had given them when he was physically present with them.

Again we see the mystery of the relationships within the Trinity. Although there is a distinction, there is an inseparable unity. On a previous occasion Jesus had said that when people know the Son they know the Father; now he says that when people have the Spirit they have the Son. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. He bears the stamp of Jesus' character just as Jesus bore the stamp of the Father's character.

The disciples who had lived with Jesus Christ in Palestine received the Spirit in unique circumstances. They knew that the gift of the Spirit would come only after Jesus had returned to the Father, and therefore they had to wait till he had physically left the world. But for others there are no such special circumstances. They receive the Spirit when by faith they receive

Christ. It is impossible for a person to have one without the other. Life 'in Christ' is life 'in the Spirit'.

The Spirit of Jesus at work

The early Christians had no doubt that Jesus lived in them and worked through them by the Holy Spirit whom he had given them. This did not make them superhuman, but it did make them more like Jesus in their attitudes and behaviour.

Examples from the New Testament show that the Holy Spirit worked through the early Christians in both spectacular and unspectacular ways. He gave them extraordinary boldness in the face of opposition, yet the quiet ability to organize church affairs smoothly. On some occasions he directed them through inner promptings and visions, on others through reasoned discussion. He taught them through the spontaneous comments of some, and through the carefully prepared arguments of others.

Christians today naturally do not have the same sense of personal acquaintance with Jesus as had those who talked, ate, worked and travelled with him in Palestine. But they are equally certain of Jesus' presence with them through the Spirit. This does not give them a sort of magical power that enables them to do successfully whatever they want to do. Nor does it guarantee them freedom from sorrow, disappointment and hardship. Jesus suffered, and his followers can expect to suffer also, but the Spirit of Jesus within them gives them strength, calmness and even joy through their sufferings.

The character the Spirit produces

At times the Holy Spirit's presence within Christians seems to make life more difficult for them. This is because of the natural tendency to sin which they, like others, are born with. That tendency is not removed when they become Christians, and will, in fact, create problems when they resist it.

Whether Jesus' followers realize it or not, the Holy Spirit was the one who awakened them to their sin, led them to Jesus

and gave them new life. The same Spirit comes to live within them permanently, and this is what causes the conflict. The old sinful human nature (sometimes called 'the flesh') fights against the Spirit, and the Spirit fights against the sinful nature.

Although Jesus' human nature was not infected by sin, he still experienced the normal temptations of human life. Even for him, victory over those temptations required self-discipline and effort. Christians, indwelt by the Spirit, can face the temptations of life with confidence, but they must not expect victory to come easily. The conflict strengthens character. That is not to say that Christians will become stern and grim. On the contrary they will find life more enjoyable than ever, for it will now have more meaning. If the Spirit of Jesus Christ is directing their efforts, the result will be a quality of character that reflects the character of Jesus Christ.

When they allow God's Spirit to do this work in their lives, Christians are said to be filled with the Spirit. That is, they allow the Spirit to have full control. This is not a once-for-all experience, nor necessarily a highly emotional experience. Certainly, they will on occasions be more strongly aware of the Spirit's presence or help, but in general the Spirit's work will be the quiet and steady work of making them more like Jesus.

Being like Jesus does not mean that Christians become religious fanatics or submit to laws that make life dull and boring. Jesus did not live like that. He came to free people not only from bondage to sin, but also from bondage to those rules and regulations that people mistakenly think will make them 'holy'. The Spirit of Christ likewise brings life and freedom. He wants people to enjoy life through enjoying those right relationships that God intended from the beginning, whether relationships with other people or with God himself.

Not merely private

The Spirit's work in the lives of Christ's people is concerned with more than their own personal development. It is concerned

also with their responsibility to take the good news of Jesus to an unbelieving world.

Before Jesus died, his followers learnt that part of the Spirit's work was to convince people that Jesus is Lord. When their faith in Jesus' lordship was confirmed through the resurrection, Jesus promised that the Spirit would empower them to witness to this fact everywhere. In a sense people in any era who know Jesus as Lord are his witnesses. Through their witness, the Spirit makes known the truth of Jesus Christ to others.

As people believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit introduces them into that vast international community known as the church. The Spirit, besides living in Christians as individuals, lives in the church as a whole. As he helps individual believers in their private prayers, so he helps the church in its public worship. Whether privately or publicly, individually or collectively, Christians are helped by the Spirit when they want to speak to God. Likewise they are helped by the Spirit when they want to hear God speaking to them; for the Spirit enables them to understand the Scriptures. He helps in their individual reading of the Bible and he helps in the teaching given in the church.

People differ from each other in their personalities and abilities, and when the Holy Spirit comes into their lives he does not remove the differences. He may change the character and behaviour of people so that they are more the sorts of people they should be, but he does not remove the variety that exists among them.

The church is likened to the human body, where different parts have different purposes, yet there is unity. The Holy Spirit has given abilities to all God's people, and the church functions properly when all the people work together by using their Spirit-given abilities for the common good.

However, the abilities that people display in their church work are not in themselves an indication of the Spirit's control in

their lives. A better indication is the development of Christian character. Abilities depend on the particular functions that the Spirit has fitted people for in the church, but character depends on the control that people allow the Spirit in their lives. The Spirit 'transforms us into Christ's likeness'. He produces 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control' (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-23).