



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

V O L U M E T H R E E

Grounded in Holy Scripture and
Understood in Light of The Church

DOUGLAS F. KELLY

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Dr Kelly writes theology with an eye to the work of our triune God and an eye to the church in this third installment of his systematic theology. He plumbs the depth of the Scriptures, dialogues with theologians throughout the ages, both east and west, and he shows the church how God in Christ through the Spirit has saved a people, the body of Christ, to live out their union with Christ. Readers will benefit from reading Dr Kelly's labor of love—a love for our triune God and for the church.

J. V. FESKO

Harriet Barbour Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi

Deploying insights and observations culled from a lifetime of study and service, Douglas Kelly's scholarly rigour and pastoral warmth sparkle in this third volume of his highly-regarded systematic theology. Here readers will find a thoroughly trinitarian exploration of the holy spirit in the life of the church that is exegetically sharp, consistently readable, and deeply informed by the full-breadth of the Christian tradition. In short, this is Reformed theology at its best.

MATTHEW C. BINGHAM

Lecturer in Systematic Theology and Church History at
Oak Hill College, London

Here is a work that is clearly the fruit of a lifetime's study and meditation. Dr Kelly guides us through the person and work of the Spirit, the doctrine of the church and the pattern of the Christian life, whilst somehow sacrificing neither depth nor readability. Harvesting insights from an extraordinary range of saints who have gone before him, Dr Kelly takes time to show how the truths he lays out emerge directly from Scripture, making this volume of great pastoral use to those called to preach and teach the riches of the Bible, as well as all those wanting to develop a robustly 'biblical' theology.

JONTY RHODES

Minister, Christ Church Central, Leeds, UK

The church of the twenty-first century desperately needs to be reestablished in the ancient doctrines of the church and the person and power of the Holy Spirit and the glorious relationship between them. I am deeply grateful for Dr Kelly's faithful ministry to the church in presenting us with this confessional and practical resource to help us more fully know and love our triune God and His beloved bride.

BURK PARSONS

Senior Pastor Of Saint Andrew's Chapel, Sanford, Florida

Editor of Tabletalk magazine

This rousing finale to Professor Kelly's Systematic Theology breathes the air of the vast scope of the Christian tradition, reflects decades of discerning yet charitable reading from all corners of the Church, demonstrates the fruit of a life of biblical meditation, and instructs young theologians in how to carry out their calling with confidence yet grace. Throughout this project Dr Kelly has closely followed the order of Calvin's definitive edition of his *Institutes*, but has also mirrored Calvin's combination of clarity and conciseness. Behind his simple and accessible prose, though, are deep wells of reflection on many of the central questions of the Christian faith and life, and we are all in the author's debt. From the first page to the last, read not only to be instructed but to be edified and even lifted up to glorify the triune God in and with His Church.

MARK GARCIA

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SYSTEMATIC
THEOLOGY
VOLUME THREE

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understood in the light of the Church

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MENTOR
Encouraging Christians to Think

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CONTENTS

Preface

Acknowledgements

Part One

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Introduction and Overview

1. The Gift of the Spirit in the Old Testament
2. The Gift of the Spirit in the New Testament
3. Reception of the Holy Spirit by the Church at Pentecost
4. Spirit Baptisms Beyond Pentecost

Part Two

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Church

5. The Holy Spirit: Bond of Christ and The Church
6. Our Union with Christ – As Understood Through the Centuries
7. Justification by Faith and Sanctification
8. The Church
9. Attributes and Marks of the Church
10. Election
11. The Word of God to His People

Part Three

Living in the Holy Spirit

12. The Christian Life

13. Commandments Regarding Our Duty to God

14. Commandments Regarding Our Duty to Humankind

15. The Lord's Prayer

16. Honoring the Holy Spirit

Bibliography

Scripture Index

Person Index

Subject Index

This book is dedicated to
WILLIAM C. MARSH

Former student, faithful friend and fellow
soldier of the cross. I am particularly
grateful for all he has done to make my
library building a reality.

*Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my
partner and fellowhelper concerning you:
or our brethren be inquired of, they are
the messengers of the churches, and the
glory of Christ. 2 CORINTHIANS 8:23
(aV)*

PREFACE

This is the third volume in my series *Systematic Theology*. Volume One dealt with the Trinity (with emphasis on the Father), Volume Two with Christ the Son, and this volume addresses the Holy Spirit and the Church. In a certain sense, I am following the outline of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, where he expounds the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the Church. Therefore, this volume (the Third, and my last) expounds the Holy Spirit and the Church. (I combine into one volume much of the material to which Calvin devoted two volumes.)

I have found it more demanding to write on the Holy Spirit than on the other Two Persons of the Blessed Trinity. That may be because, as I state later in this volume, although the Holy Spirit is closest to us of those in the Trinity, yet He is the hardest to see, because He does not choose to speak much of Himself, but – as one may figuratively say – hides Himself in the folds of the humanity of Christ. We have some conception of God the Father on His rainbow-circled throne, and of course of the incarnate Christ who came here below to save His people by His life, death, and resurrection, so fully presented in the Holy Scriptures. But we do not see the Holy Spirit, yet we know Him most profoundly on the inside of ourselves as redeemed persons, for He is the One who by His mysterious and all-powerful work has united us to Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and this Christ brings us directly to the Father, as we see in 1 Peter 3:18: '*For Christ also hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God ...*'

It is in Christ that we meet the Holy Spirit, and it is in the Holy Spirit that we meet Christ – both in the inspired Scriptures, and in His work in the Church and in our renewed personalities. The Spirit is the One who illumines us to understand the Holy Scriptures. Christ makes us alive by uniting us to Himself in the blessed Spirit, and continues His sanctifying work within us through the energies of that same Spirit, always operating in accordance with the verities given us in the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit, therefore, is the One who makes alive the Church and the individual believer in the Church. Since He makes us alive, and continues to sanctify us with a view to inexorable glory, we do well to focus on this blessed and mysterious Person! Yet the end result will leave us gazing upon Christ, the beloved One of the Father! That will be extremely pleasing to the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:12-15).

May this volume serve in the grand task of shedding divine light upon the One whom the Spirit sets before us in the written Word, for our final transformation into the Son's likeness!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since this work has been pursued on and off for several years, it is almost certain that I will forget some who have lent a very helping hand. Although now I am (supposedly) retired, several student assistants helped me greatly during my later years of the professorate at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. They include: (Rev.) Duncan Rankin, now a minister of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Virginia, (Rev.) Johnathan Keenan, now working with the Reformed University Ministries in California, (Rev.) Alex Mark, now a PCA minister in Beaufort, South Carolina, (Rev.) Jay Crout, now an ARP minister in Greenville, South Carolina, (Rev.) Matt Miller, now an ARP minister in Greenville, South Carolina, (Rev.) Mark Miller, minister of the ARP in Clover, South Carolina, and (Rev.) Blake Schwarz, minister of Park Cities PCA in Dallas, Texas.

Above all others, my gratitude is owed to my wife Caroline, who has done a massive amount of work on the computer for me (an inescapable sort of technology that I still find difficult to negotiate), and to my youngest son, Patrick (M. D.), who has interacted with me theologically all the way through. Medical Doctor though he is, his theological acumen is very high, along with a humble spirit. I have made many changes through his suggestions. I am grateful to have worked once again with (Rev.) Malcolm MacLean of Inverness, Scotland.

We can never know exactly who has prayed for us, but I am aware of the prayer meetings of several churches, which have made regular intercession for this project, such as First Presbyterian Church of Dillon, South Carolina, Reedy Creek Presbyterian Church of Minturn, SC, and Union Presbyterian Church near Carthage, North Carolina.

PART ONE

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Supreme Gift is God Himself, sharing His innermost life with His own people. By means of the Holy Spirit, who is ‘the bond of charity between the Father and the Son’, He comes into us, so that we know God, and are thereby lifted in His eternal salvation. Prophet, priest, and king are Old Testament types of what Christ became and did for our salvation.

God in his goodness gives Himself to His people. That is the supreme gift. As Saint Thomas wrote: ‘He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures ...’¹ This is the essential giving nature of God, brought out in James 1:5, where, to encourage God’s people to seek for wisdom, James says that ‘God is the giving God’.²

We begin with the fact that God created men and women in His own image so that He might relate to them personally, and they to Him. But since God is infinitely above us, for us humans to know God, God Himself must be in charge of the means of our knowing, and thus we only know Him personally insofar as He gives Himself to us, who are infinitely below His eternal being.

The Father accomplishes this by means of giving His Son and Spirit, and at the same time, providing our capacity to grasp the divine Persons. He does this supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ, the God/man, as we shall see. As Saint Basil wrote: ‘... just as the Father is made visible in the Son, so also the Son is recognized in the Spirit.’³ Furthermore, in Him, heaven and earth are united, eternity is bound together with the present moment, and in Him the eternal God is forever united with humankind.

The grounds for this union were being prepared in the very conception of the life of the cosmos (Gen. 1:2), creating man through the Word (cf. John 1:1-3), in the image of Jesus to extend His kingdom through all the world (Gen. 1:27-28). The Spirit spoke, and man heard and obeyed. This was life in the Garden, when ‘God walked in the Garden with man in the cool (literally, *ruach*) of the day’ (Gen. 3:8).

When man fell, however, this blest union was severed: life became death, order chaos, and existence a sort of living curse. Thus, life in the presence of the Lord was lost. This fulness of this divine/human union had to be relearned by God's people, vividly characterized in their exile from the Promised Land to Babylon.

This 'relearning' would take the errant people of God beyond the confines of this fallen age. Much of the Pentateuch shows the chosen people being brought into covenants with God: first, Noahic, then Abrahamic, then Mosaic. These historical developments increasingly convey salvation from cosmic judgment, life by faith, obedience ensuing, with the end being man's return to the New Eden in God's presence. Or as Irenaeus puts it, there are four covenants given to the human race: 'One, prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, after the deluge, under Noah; the third, the giving of the Law, under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom.'⁴

Relearning was necessary because the history of Israel showed that the people of God cannot re-enter Eden. Instead, Eden must be recreated, and man recreated for it, with his heart, soul and spirit reformed (Ezek. 36:25-28), under a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus makes this re-creation a reality, as He is the Mediator of the New Covenant. For us to enter this covenant, He speaks of our being 'born again' or 'born from above' (John 3:3, 5). This is a divine gift, administered by the Holy Spirit.

Few realities could be so important to us fallen humans as this 'Gift' – which was the term some of the Church Fathers used to speak of the Holy Spirit. How glad we humans should be that this is who He is – the Gift! Saint Augustine, for instance, describes the Holy Spirit as '... the gift of the Father and the Son When we say, therefore, the gift of the giver, and the giver of the gift, we speak in both cases relatively in reciprocal reference. Therefore the Holy Spirit is a certain unutterable communion of the Father and the Son; and on that account, perhaps, he is so called, because the same name is suitable to both the Father and the Son....In order, therefore, that the communion of both may be signified from a name which is suitable to both, the Holy Spirit is called the gift of both.'⁵

But the giving of God does not merely wait upon the history of the human race, it goes back through all eternity into the Triune God Himself. The Church Fathers help us to grasp this eternal giving within God, for

during the first four centuries they were constantly grappling with the demanding concept of the three persons of the Trinity found in the Scriptures.

Augustine frequently refers to the Holy Spirit as ‘the bond of charity’ between the Father and the Son: ‘... that absolute love which joins together Father and Son, and [which] joins us also from beneath ...’⁶ And at the same time, he constantly considers Him to be a distinct person, as much as the Father and the Son are distinct (but never separated) persons.⁷ Referring to Augustine, H. Bavinck points out, ‘The Holy Spirit was a gift before he had been given to anyone.’⁸ That is, even before time began, the Holy Spirit was involved in the eternal procession within the divine being, in which He was gift of both Father and Son to and from one another. The seventeenth-century Francis Turretin later explains that both the Son and the Spirit can properly be called the gift of God, and particularly applies this to our salvation:

... (just as Christ, who is a divine person, is nevertheless called the gift of God (John 3:16; 4:10; Isa. 9:6). Thus the Holy Spirit can be called the gift of God. It may seem paradoxical, but it does not imply a contradiction for one to be both a gift and the giver himself, since Christ gave himself for us and to us for the support of our eternal life; “*The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*” (John 6:51).⁹

To return to the Fathers, Saint Athanasius in the fourth century notes that any saving knowledge we may have of the love of God can only come through the gift of the Holy Spirit to us. ‘As the grace given is from the Father through the Son, so we can have no communion in the gift except in the Holy Spirit. For it is when we partake of him that we have the love of the Father and the grace of the Son and the communion of the Spirit himself.’¹⁰

Gregory of Nazianzus (in his *Oration on Holy Baptism*) speaks of the illumination we receive in Christ as ‘The Gift’. Among other things that occur in this illumination, he mentions ‘the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word ...’¹¹ Then he adds: ‘And as Christ the Giver of it is called by many names, so too is this gift We call it, the Gift, the Grace, the Baptism, Unction, Illumination We call it the Gift, because it is given to us in return for nothing on our part ...’¹²

This divine gift, who comes to us clothed with many a saving blessing, is none less than Almighty God Himself. He, therefore, is absolutely essential to our salvation, for He alone can bring us into the saving knowledge of God the Father through union with God the Son. He is brought before us throughout the history of redemption in the Scriptures of both Old and New Testaments. The One whose presence is essential to our eternal salvation is well worth our most serious study and highest thoughts.

As we search through the Old Testament, we find that the Spirit of God is, in His own way, at times nearly invisible, preparing to reveal the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Pentateuch, the Spirit is active in providing the categories of the Covenant, the redemption of God's people, the Law of God, the Tabernacle presence of the Lord, along with the promise of the New Creation. The Histories (as in Kings and Chronicles) begin to center all of these realities in a Person (foreshadowed in Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, and finally, the Messianic David kingship). Then, as this Davidic Kingdom divides, the Northern branch falls away into idolatry rather quickly, and well over a century later, the Southern Kingdom of Judah falters. Throughout this time of increasing apostasy, God raises up prophets by His Spirit. Revelation 19:10 shows that the Spirit of prophecy is the 'testimony of Jesus'. Thus, the pre-incarnate Christ through his Spirit was at work during the heights and depths of the history of Israel in the Old Testament.

So we find that, throughout the Old Testament and long before His incarnation, Christ the Lord was using the categories of prophet, priest, and king, to describe those who would redeem Israel into the New Creation. Isaiah, Chapters 60 to 65, epitomizes the intertwining of these themes.

Prophet

First we meet Him at work as the supreme prophet, promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19:

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken I will raise up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

Peter explicates something of this in his First Epistle:

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Priest

Next, Christ is portrayed in the High Priest, who represented God to man and man to God in the atoning blood, and all acts of worship in Tabernacle and Temple. Aaron and his descendants made corporate worship acceptable by sprinkling incense upon a censer of burning coals and wafting its scent around the Temple (cf. Lev. 16:12, 13). They had the authority to lay their hands upon the sacrificial animal as sinners confessed their sins, transferring, as it were, their sins to the appointed sacrifice (cf. Lev. 3:2). They also had the authority to instruct the people in the Law of the Lord, following in the steps of Moses, who declared to Israel the feasts of the Lord (cf. Lev. 23:44). And they were empowered to put the benediction upon God's people: 'Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LoRd bless thee, and keep thee: The LoRd make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them' (Num. 6:23-27).

Christ, however, is different from all the other priests, in that while they sacrificed animal substitutes, He literally sacrificed Himself as the supreme and final sin offering. We see this in the 'servant songs' of Isaiah, as in Isaiah, chapters 42 to 53. For instance, we are told in Isaiah 53:4, 5: 'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet did we esteem stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.'

According to the Book of Hebrews, Christ took on the entirety of our nature so as to deliver it from the inside out, thereby defeating our enemies:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same: that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 2:14-18).

King

Finally, as far as kingship, we have to admit that the office of king has a problematic beginning within Israel. Although Moab and the other surrounding countries long had kings, Israel had traditionally seen God as their king, and understood that the Lord raised up judges to administer the government (cf. Judg. 2:16). However, by the time of Samuel, the people of Israel were demanding a king, like the nations around them (cf. 1 Sam. 8:4ff.). God allowed it, but warned them through Samuel of the severe problems that kingship would entail (cf. 1 Sam. 8). Even with an earthly king, they should continue to act as they did when the Lord was their king (1 Sam. 12:12-15; 24-25), for only then could they be blessed.

Samuel was first divinely led to Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, an impressive person, upon whom the Spirit came (cf. 1 Sam. 10:8-10), but who eventually failed in character and faith. In impatience, he offered sacrifice before Samuel could arrive (1 Sam. 13:8-14) and then spared some of the Amalekites (whom God had appointed for destruction according to 1 Sam. 15:6-9; 28:18). Whereupon the Lord declared that He would remove him from the throne (1 Sam. 15:11, 22, 35).

The Lord then instructed Samuel to find someone else to become king, and directed him to look among Jesse's sons (1 Sam. 16:1-5), members of the tribe of Judah. The chosen one turned out to be David, a younger son who kept the sheep. The Spirit of God, from the day Samuel secretly anointed him, came upon David, and never left (1 Sam. 16:13). By contrast, because of his disobedience and proud heart, the Lord sent an evil spirit to trouble Saul (1 Sam. 16:14) who eventually became insane, gripped with

fear of his now son-in-law, David. Although Saul tried to kill him, David eventually prevailed, for the Lord was with him, having departed from Saul. So we see that instead of depending on the Spirit of God, as a king should, Saul actually turned to evil spirits, consulting the witch of Endor before a final battle with the Philistines. Samuel himself was even sent back from the other world to announce judgment upon him in his coming death (1 Sam. 28:7-25).

Indue time, David was made king, first over the tribe of Judah, reigning from Hebron for seven years and six months (2 Sam. 2:11). Then, after Saul's descendant Ishbosheth and his captain Abner were killed (2 Sam. 3 and 4), the elders of Israel invited David to become their king (2 Sam. 5:3). 'David was thirty years old [at the beginning of his reign over all Israel], and he reigned forty years' (2 Sam. 5:4). 2 Samuel 5:10 summarizes the great success of David's long reign: 'And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him.' In contrast to Saul, David's heart was upon God, who promised to establish his house, and he turned God's promises into prayer: 'And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it forever, and do as thou hast said' (2 Sam. 7:25). He prayed this way in order that the name of God might be magnified (2 Sam. 7:26).

David was not perfect, least of all in his adultery with Bathsheba, and his having her husband killed (2 Sam. 11), and his confession of these sins in Psalms 32 and 51 have been classics of true repentance over subsequent millennia. In all of his battles, 'the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went' (2 Sam. 8:14), and although he and his family would bear heavy consequences for these sins (as, for example, in the rebellion and death of Absalom, and the rebellion of most of Israel against him), the Spirit of God continued with him.

Still, the kingship of David was the greatest in all the history of Israel. Although it was eclipsed by his son Solomon in terms of sheer wealth and power, Solomon did not have the same godly heart, although we are told that he loved the Lord (cf. 1 Kings 3:3). Without entering into historical details, found in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles, and elsewhere in the prophets, most of the kings who followed David and Solomon were men of far lesser character and stately success (with some exceptions like Jehoshaphat and Josiah). Solomon himself took on a huge harem, including many foreign wives, for whom he constructed places of worship.

The kings of Israel became apostate from their beginning, with the apostasy occurring first in the Northern Kingdom immediately after it split from Judah in the time of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Not much more than a century or two later, the Southern Kingdom would also apostatize, and for its punishment, would be deported into Babylon, where it learned not to worship idols, before returning home some seventy years later, as we see in Ezra and Nehemiah. After the time of captivity in Babylon, kings were no longer relevant in the history of the people of God, for the people would live ever after under foreign powers, such as Babylon, Medo-Persia, and then Rome.

Yet in spite of failure after failure of all these human kings over the centuries, the concept of kingship would nevertheless be used by the Holy Spirit, speaking through the writers of Scripture, to teach essential truths about the sovereign reign of God Himself. This reign would be concentrated in the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. Earthly kings, even the best ones, could only foreshadow the King of Glory, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose body, the Church, as Dumitru Staniloae writes, would be 'fully spiritualized (pneumatized)' in such a way that the Spirit can actually bring his life into our spirits.¹³

The Continual Presence of the Spirit in the Old Testament

From our vantage point, we can look back and see that the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was conforming Israel into the image of the Lord (Gen. 1:27) so that her people, as living icons, might extend God's reign throughout the entire cosmos (Gen. 1:28), representing Him as a Kingdom of Priests (Exod. 19:6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6). When we reach the New Testament, we discover that this image of the Lord that had been resisted, corrupted, marred and finally rejected in the history of Israel is fully revealed and finally perfected in Jesus.

Now we can understand the meaning of the opening verses of the Gospel of Mark, which describe the baptism of Jesus, and dramatically announce that the heavens are 'torn open' with the eternal Shekinah Glory of the Lord shining forth (Exod. 40:34-38; 2 Chron. 7:1-4; Isa. 64:1). This glory which had departed from the Temple (Ezek. 8:11) now returns to rest upon Jesus in His baptism (Mark 1:9-11; Matt. 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22). His body, being fully penetrated by the Spirit, radiates the glory of the Lord, and

constitutes the New Temple for His people (John 1:14), and is thus the place where God fully meets man (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Matt. 1:23).

Through his death, which constitutes the destruction of the ‘temple of his body’, the true temple is then recreated in His crucified and risen body (cf. Ezek. 42:16-20):

Jesus answered, and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said (John 2:19-22).

After His resurrection, His new creational body, fully spiritualized, ascends to the glory of the Father, and can then be poured into the inner beings of His followers (John 7:37-39), as it is ‘breathed upon them’ (John 20:20-22) through the Spirit (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:1-4), constituting them ‘living stones’ of the new temple community (Hosea 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:4-10). In short, the living reality of the life, resurrection and death of Jesus is communicated to us as Christ’s body becomes fully spiritualized in His glorification, in such a way that it actually operates within us through the Holy Spirit.

One can briefly survey the Spirit’s work in the Old Testament, noting that He is never separate from Christ, but is forming His kingdom as the centuries go by in the history of Israel. We find Him in Genesis 1–10 in creation and re-creation. In Genesis 11–50 we see how He is heard and obeyed among the Patriarchs, not without much struggle. Through various encounters, where there was struggle, failure and blessing, the Messianic line is at the heart of the inauguration of the kingdom, first when there was no written Word, and then when the Scriptures are given.

In Exodus, the Spirit, as active agent of the Messiah, is organizing the people of God into a kingdom of priests, under the Torah. They are led by the Priesthood and are opened up to the glory of the Lord in the Tabernacle. In Leviticus, we see the presence of the Spirit in the fire, oil, and blood in the priestly service of the Tabernacle, for the cleansing of God’s people, and their presentation to God. In Numbers, the true Israel is formed and reformed for the extension of God’s kingdom amidst resistance, rebellion

and judgment. In Deuteronomy, God's people begin to be delivered into the life of new creational wisdom and understanding, given in the statutes and commandments of the Lord to guide His people into life in the Promised Land.

In the Old Testament Histories, the Holy Spirit is progressively working to reveal Jesus in fuller and further measure to His people. Thus, eternity is brought with its transforming power into fallen time. After the Spirit in the Pentateuch builds the categories of the Covenant, the Law, and the Tabernacle Presence of the Lord and the promise of the new creation, the Histories begin to center all of these in a Person.

A new phase of the Old Testament experience begins with Joshua (from which name 'Jesus' is derived – i.e. the Lord saves), as he leads the people of God across the Jordan River (in some respects, representing death) into the Promised Land (which in turn represents the new creation). After Joshua come the Judges, who are in various ways anointed by the Spirit for their tasks before there was any earthly king in Israel. They bring redemption and salvation from the enemies of the surrounding fallen age. The narrative begins by focusing on the establishment of an eternal kingdom, in and through the Messianic King, who will in due season baptize his people with 'water and fire'. He will purify them and recreate them to receive His risen and glorified Presence, which is spiritualized after His death, resurrection, and ascension (cf. John 7:37-39). That is how He can literally be brought inside of us through the Spirit.

This reality of a life that is true in the presence of a Holy God is expounded next in the Prophets and clarified in the Wisdom literature. It is the Spirit of God who enables God's people to apply the Torah to the spectrum of their life in a fallen age. This practical godly wisdom is often called *hokmah*. By it, the people of God show in their lives in this world what God is like. Proverbs 1:7-9 uses several synonyms to demonstrate what wisdom is like: 'The fear of the LoRd is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.'

We may summarize the usage of wisdom in the main storyline of the Old Testament. The opening occurrence comes in Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh, after which he counsels Pharaoh to seek out 'a man discreet (*biynah*) and wise (*chakam*)' to manage the supplies of Egypt

during the coming years of famine (Gen. 41:39). Joseph, a patriarch and prophet, interpreted the Word of God and applied it to the immediate realities. Such wisdom was from the Spirit.

The next use occurs in Moses' review of Covenant history in preparation for the renewal of the Covenant in light of their entrance into the Promised Land. Knowing their great need of leadership as they cross over the Jordan, he directs them to 'Take you wise men (*chakam*), and understanding (*biyn*), and known among your tribes' to be rulers over them, who will guide them into the Laws of the Lord (Deut. 1:13). Insofar as they 'keep' (*shamah*) and 'do the statutes of the Lord', this will become their 'wisdom' (*chokmah*) and 'understanding' (*biynah*) in the sight of the nations, who will 'hear of them [the statutes] and say, Surely this great nation is a wise (*chakam*) and understanding people' (Deut. 4:6).

The final three instances in Deuteronomy all appear in the Song of Moses. Here, the meaning transitions from noun to verbal form, as he first commands the people to 'remember the days of old, and consider (*biyn*) the years of many generations' (Deut. 32:7), particularly how the Lord had found Israel 'in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness,' and how in His tender mercies, He 'led him about and instructed him, and kept him as the apple of his eye' (Deut. 32:10). Then after recounting the Lord's faithfulness to His people, in contrast to Israel's guilt and idolatry in breaking the Deuteronomic treaty that called forth all the enactments of Covenant curses, Moses gives Israel a promise of future blessing in Covenant renewal. Some have called it 'the Soliloquy from the Heart of God': 'O that they were wise (*chakam*), that they understood (*sakal*) this, that they would consider (*biyn*) their latter end! How one should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LoRd had shut them up?' (Deut. 32:29-30).

The Holy Spirit Manifested in the Old Testament

But, even the wisest prophet, priest, or king, is nothing without the life, the breath of God. A central picture of what the Spirit of God does is that of the Spirit breathing upon the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37.

And [he] caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou

knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LoRd. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army (Ezek. 37:1-5; 10).

This picture shows that the Lord had put together the structure of the bodies, which previously had been dried and separated – mere piles of bones. Yet once He puts them skillfully back together, they are still not alive. He must breathe into them the breath of life, that is, the Holy Spirit. This means clearly that the people of God in the Old Testament partook of the Holy Spirit, or they would not have been living as the people of God.

The difference is not entirely clear between the experience of Old and New Testament saints of having the Spirit of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the believers on the Day of Pentecost certainly indicates a profound new phase in the relationship of the elect to God the Holy Spirit. He is now personally in them in a fullness of power that presumably was not the same in the Old Testament. The Old Testament believers certainly knew the presence of the Spirit, or else they could not have been saved. After his great sins, David prayed, ‘Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit¹⁴ from me’ (Ps. 51:11). But it was apparently not with the same inner fullness that would be the case after Pentecost.

That is because human nature had not yet been adapted to be the dwelling place of the holy God. Christ in His humanity would accomplish that (cf. Heb. 2:14-18). It would only be after the finished work of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit that we believing humans come into fulness of union with Christ. That was foreshadowed in the Old Testament, but only achieved totally in the New.

It may not be amiss to say that although the Holy Spirit is as unchanging as any member of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Spirit was also somehow adapted to come with fulness of power into the personalities of the redeemed, without tearing them apart. That is, the work that Christ did in redeeming fallen humanity in Himself, was always powerfully accompanied by the Spirit. Because the Spirit is by nature invisible, we cannot see just how He accomplishes this by Himself, for He hides Himself in the folds of

Christ's humanity. And in doing so, He renews us from the inside out, to be living stones in the Temple of God.

It is a marvel: the Spirit inspires the testimony to Jesus of prophets and apostles, and yet it is only in Jesus that we really meet the Spirit in His personal fullness! Instead of directly seeing Him, we see Jesus, and that is what the blessed Spirit wants, as we can see from John 16: 12-15:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

This is the source of the highest human blessedness that can ever be known!

1. Thomas Aquinas, Question 47, First Article, in *Summa of the Summa*, Edited and Annotated by Peter Kreeft (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1990), p. 204.

2. By means of a 'genitive absolute' – i.e. *para tou didontos Theou* ...

3. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, vol. viii (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1894), 26.64.

4. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. I, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), III. XI, p. 7.

5. Augustine, *On the Holy Trinity*, XII, II (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church), vol. III, p. 93.

6. *Ibid.*, VII. III (p. 108).

7. Augustine, *op. cit.*, I, IX: 'But in order to intimate the Trinity, some things are separately affirmed, the Persons being also separately named; and yet are not to be understood as though the other Persons were excluded, on account of the unity of the same Trinity and the One substance and Godhead of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (p. 28).

8. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, vol. 2, John Bolt, General Editor, and John Vriend, Translator (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids Michigan, 2004), p. 321.

9. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Volume I, First Through Tenth Topics, Translated by George Musgrave Giger, Edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing: Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1992), p. 307.

10. Athanasius, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit to Bishop Serapion*, with the translation and notes by C. R. B. Shapland, originally published by Epworth Press, 1951, Epistle One, section 31.
11. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, XL, III.
12. Ibid., *Oration XL*, IV.
13. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 4, The Church Communion in the Holy Spirit*, Translated and edited by Ioan Ionita (Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, Massachusetts, 2012), vol. 4, chapter 1. Staniloae, an Eastern Orthodox theologian of Romania (1903–1993) who was professor of Dogmatics in Bucharest, wrote six volumes of dogmatic theology, now translated into English.
14. The King James Version sometimes uses lower case when referring to the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 1

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The early phases of the work of the Spirit are traced through the Pentateuch, the Histories, and Wisdom Literature, for throughout the Old Testament, throughout the Old Testament era, He is adapting human nature to be the temple of God.

The Spirit of God is not so clearly set forth in the Old Testament as in the New, but He has His place from the very beginning of creation, although we shall see that long centuries of the history of the people of God must pass before the Spirit's personhood is filled out in vastly larger degree in the knowledge of the Old Testament Church. As Bavinck rightly remarked: 'The Old Testament conveys only an inexplicit indication of God's Trinitarian existence. It is [the first part] of the record of the gradually unfolding doctrine of the Trinity.'¹ And we must never forget that true doctrine merely follows the unfolding work of God in His creation, and the redemptive experience of His presence in and with His people over thousands of years.

Gregory of Nazianzus, who was also well aware of this slow development of divine truths, expressed succinctly (in the fourth century) this 'gradual unfolding' of complex truths in the growth of Scripture: 'You see lights breaking upon us gradually; and the order of theology, which is better for us to keep, neither proclaiming things too suddenly, nor yet keeping them hidden to the end ...'²

As far as the Holy Spirit, in the earliest parts of the Old Testament, the two main words for 'spirit' are connected to 'breath'. As Henry B. Swete wrote: 'The Hebrew *ruah*, like the Greek *pneuma* and the Latin *spiritus*, originally had a physiological and not a psychological value, denoting the human breath.'³ He adds: 'The Spirit of God is the vital power which belongs to the Divine Being, and is seen to be operative in the world and in men. It is the Divine Energy which is the origin of all created life, and especially of human existence and the faculties of human nature.'⁴

The Gift at Work in Creation

We first meet the One whom we come to know as the Holy Spirit in the very first chapter of Genesis, and in the second verse: ‘And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ What we call ‘absolute creation’ took place as described in Genesis 1:1, when God brought all things out of nothing by the word of His power. And then verses 2-31 chronicle the process in which the material, spatial mass is shaped into a beautiful, structured form. Going, as it were, from a sort of ‘chaos’ to a well ordered ‘cosmos’ (to use the words of Gerhard Von Rad).⁵

Aalders suggests that the term ‘waters’ refers to the same substance as ‘the deep’.⁶ Wolfgang Capito writes that the condition of the early earth as first created must have been something like ‘an abyss “filled with a confusion of undifferentiated water and mud” in complete darkness, which would unhinge any human mind that attempted to penetrate it.’⁷

Into this dark, watery mass, Genesis 1:2 tells us that ‘the Spirit of God was moving upon the face of the waters’. The participle ‘moving’ means something like ‘hovering’ or ‘brooding’, as it does in the Pi’el stem of the Hebrew verb in Deuteronomy 32:11, where it pictures God’s guidance of His people like an eagle brooding over its nest. This ‘hovering’ over the waters by the Spirit of God shows that the biblical world view is profoundly different from the philosophical dichotomy that Deism places between God and the material world. God’s hand and presence are never lifted from the elements and working of the material realm.

This ‘hovering’ demonstrates that God, through His Spirit, is immediately involved with the complex, and as yet inchoate material elements, shaping them into a beautifully ordered structure, that will be the perfect home for human and animal life. Leupold suggests that ‘The germs of all that is created were placed into dead matter by [God]. His was the preparatory work for leading over from the inorganic to the organic.’⁸

Other commentators have supplied an impersonal translation of ‘Spirit’ at this point. Claus Westermann translated it as ‘God’s wind’.⁹ Von Rad translates it as ‘fearful storm’.¹⁰ But I think it preferable to follow E. J. Young, who lists three reasons why ‘Spirit’ may not be reduced to wind.¹¹ First, Moses could have used the ordinary expression for wind, which is found in Jonah 1:4 and Job 1:19, but rather he uses the word for Spirit. Secondly, the participle (‘hovering’) does not describe the blowing of a

wind. Thirdly, the mention of a mighty wind at this point would be out of place. He adds: 'If the third clause simply states that a mighty wind was blowing ... it does not contribute to showing that the earth was uninhabitable.'¹² Hence, the presence and working of the Spirit, as He brooded over the waters, demonstrates the wonders of the infinite God forming the inchoate mass into a place of beauty for human habitation. This tells us much about who the Spirit of God is: He executes and brings to perfection the counsel of God, and does so with infinite power.

Pierre Viret rejoices in how the Lord makes nature so beautiful, like a sort of natural symphony, and, at the same time, so useful: '... He wished to join an excellent beauty to their profit and usefulness ... the little birds walking, flying and singing in the middle of [lovely spaces], by a great melody and natural music.'¹³ 'Since God shows marvels in all these things ... what will it be when we come to consider their natures, their properties, and virtues, both most useful, and remedies for men who make use of them.'¹⁴

The Gift at Work in the Human Race

In addition to creation, the early parts of the Old Testament show the working of the Spirit in dealing with a recalcitrant human race, and especially in equipping God's people for service.

The Spirit largely withdrew from the rebellious human race just before the Flood, as we see in Genesis 6:3: 'And the LoRd said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man ...' That clearly implies that the Spirit had been at work in the human race, to move them towards obedience to God, but there came a point of no return, and after that, disaster fell upon all but one chosen family. To reject the promptings of the Holy Spirit is to reject God, and to leave ourselves exposed to the open wrath of God. Similarly, the Spirit withdrew from Saul after his severe disobedience (1 Sam. 16:14).

But to follow His leadings is to find ourselves equipped to glorify God. Fourth-century Athanasius appositely summarized much of the work of the Spirit throughout the long reaches of the Old Testament as follows:

... In Numbers, Moses says to the son of Nun, 'Be not jealous for me. Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, when the Lord bestows his Spirit upon them.'¹⁵ In Judges it is said of Gothoniël [Othniel], 'And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel.'¹⁶ "And again:

‘The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.’¹⁷ And concerning Samson: ‘The child grew,’ it says, ‘and the Spirit of the Lord began to accompany him,’ and ‘The Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily.’¹⁸ David sings: ‘Take not thy Holy Spirit from me’;¹⁹ and again, in the one hundred and forty-second Psalm: ‘Thy good Spirit shall lead me in a plain country, for thy name’s sake, O Lord.’²⁰ In Isaiah it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me.’²¹ And before this it was said: ‘Woe to you, rebellious children! Thus saith the Lord: You took counsel, but not from me, and made covenants, but not through my Spirit to add sins to sins.’²² And again: ‘Hear these things. From the beginning, I have not spoken in secret. When it was, I was there. And now the Lord hath sent me, and his Spirit.’²³ A little later he speaks thus: ‘And this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, My spirit which is upon thee’;²⁴ and again in what follows he adds: ‘Neither envoy nor angel, but the Lord himself saved them, because he loved them and had mercy on them; he himself redeemed them and took them up and exalted them all the days of the age. But they were disobedient and provoked his Holy Spirit, and he was turned to enmity toward them.’²⁵ And Ezekiel speaks thus: ‘And the Spirit took me up and brought me to the land of the Chaldeans, to the Captivity in a vision, by the Spirit of God.’²⁶ In Daniel: ‘God raised up the Holy Spirit of a young man whose name was Daniel, and he cried with a loud voice, I am clear from the blood of this woman.’²⁷ Micah says: ‘The house of Jacob provoked the Spirit of the Lord’;²⁸ and by Joel, God says: ‘And it shall be after these things that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.’²⁹ Again, through Zechariah the voice of God says: ‘But receive my words and my commandments which I charge by my Spirit to my servants the prophets,’³⁰ and when the prophet rebukes the people a little farther on, he says: ‘They make their hearts disobedient, lest they should hear my law and the words which the Lord of hosts has sent by his Spirit in the hands of the prophets of old.’³¹ These few examples we have collected and set down from the Old Testament.³²

In these and many other references in the Old Testament, we see that the Spirit of God helps to bring to completion the plan of God, as in the work of creation and within humankind. As Bavinck notes, there is a direct connection between the Holy Spirit and beauty: ‘... it is through his Spirit that he is immanent in the creation and vivifies and beautifies it all.’³³ Basil

the Great had spoken similarly in his *De Spiritu Sancto*, where he describes ‘the Spirit as the perfecting cause’, and ‘perfecting through the Spirit’.³⁴ He adds: ‘All the glorious and unspeakable harmony of the highest heavens both in the service of God, and in the mutual concord of the celestial powers, can therefore only be preserved by the direction of the Spirit.’³⁵

As the verses used by Athanasius show us, within the created order, Scripture pictures the Spirit of God exerting mighty power in bringing the world into being, and then in upholding it. Psalm 33:6 says: ‘By the word of the LoRd were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.’ (Here again, we see ‘breath’ and ‘word’ used in an interchangeable fashion). Job 26:13 shows the interchangeability of Spirit and ‘hand of God’ in creation: ‘By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens: his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.’

The Spirit of God is involved in the giving of physical life. ‘Breath’ conveys a direct imparting of the energy of life that comes from God. Job 33:4 makes this connection explicit: ‘The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.’ Ecclesiastes 12:7 shows that when the spirit departs from a human, he or she must return to the lifeless dust: ‘Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.’ (This assumes that the human spirit, which was breathed into man by the action of the Spirit of God, can depart at the given time, thereby removing the organizing principle of the ‘dust’, so that the body begins its decomposition.)

Ezekiel saw the ‘Spirit of life’ guiding the strange chariot of history with its wheels (Ezek. 1:20), and later saw that same Spirit breathing upon the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-10) and making them alive. In Ezekiel 37:14, God told the prophet that ‘I shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live.’ We notice that Ezekiel uses the Hebrew possessive suffix (of the Lord), ‘my spirit’ (37:14). Habakkuk 2:18-20 speaks of the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. This power is not to be found in dumb idols.

The creation and sustenance of the natural realm, including the human body and spirit, are all directly dependent upon the presence of God, working all things according to His will. But, as John Calvin’s colleague, Pierre Viret, pointed out in the midst of a vast and mind-expanding meditation on God’s presence in all creation and all its functioning, it is necessary to have ‘the eyes of faith’ to see and contemplate ‘this unspeakable height and wisdom and goodness of God, incomprehensible

and infinite, which shine forth in all his works and creatures ... as in beautiful and clear mirrors.’³⁶

The Gift and Understanding

But the Spirit gives more than physical life and the organization necessary for that life in the complex body. Elsewhere, we see that the Spirit of God endows humankind with intellectual capacity and wisdom. Job 32:8 states: ‘But there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.’ Spirit here refers to the Spirit of God, not that of man, for it is parallel in this text to ‘the inspiration of the Almighty’. The connection of spirit and wisdom is shown in the unction that the Holy Spirit will bring upon the Messiah, as in Isaiah 11:2: ‘And the spirit of the LoRd shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LoRd ...’

Though we have not yet come to a serious study of the references in the New Testament to the Spirit, when we do so, we will find in many parts of it a strong connection between the Spirit and wisdom. Some of the prayers of the Apostle Paul, for instance, bring it out, as in Ephesians 1:17,18: ‘That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling ...’

Long before that, however, in the early books of the Old Testament, we discover how the Spirit of God imparts wisdom to God’s servants to enable them to fulfill their appointed tasks within creation (and here we recall how the Spirit executes the plan of God with the beauty of completion). The patriarch Joseph demonstrated at a high level the wisdom from the Spirit. God’s favor upon him caused him to be ‘discrete and wise’, so that Pharaoh had to note: ‘Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the spirit of God is?’ (Gen. 41:33, 38). Joseph, in fact, is the first person said to be ‘wise’ in the Old Testament.

A later Pharaoh would be much less pleased when he had to deal with Moses, whom the same God who had endowed Joseph raised up to lead His people out of Egyptian slavery, and organize them into a nation in the freedom of the wilderness. Numbers 11:25 shows that the Spirit was upon Moses and the seventy elders who helped him govern the vast nation of

former slaves: ‘And the LoRd came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders, and it came to pass, that when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied and did not cease.’

The Spirit of God guided the people of Israel during their wandering in the wilderness. Isaiah 63:13,14 mentions it: ‘Where is he ... That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LoRd caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.’ Yet these blest people were disobedient and ‘grieved his holy Spirit’.

The Spirit of God not only guided the people of Israel in desolate places, but also ministered to them in particular ways, to orient their lives to Him in worship. He came upon craftsmen who were thereby endowed to construct the Tabernacle. This forerunner of the Temple was – as John Owen explained – an exemplification of the human nature of Christ:

This tabernacle, whereby he came a high priest, was his own human nature. The bodies of men are often called their tabernacles (2 Cor. v. 1; 2 Pet. i.14). And Christ called his own body the temple, John ii.19. His flesh was the veil, Heb. x.20. And in his incarnation, he is said to ‘pitch his tabernacle among us,’ John i.14. Herein dwelt ‘the fulness of the Godhead bodily,’ Col. ii.9, – that is, substantially; represented by all the pledges of God’s presence in the tabernacle of old. This was that tabernacle wherein the Son of God administered his sacerdotal office in this world, and wherein he continueth to do so in his intercession.³⁷

Two of these craftsmen are named in Exodus 31:1-11 (see also Exodus 35:30-35): Bezaleel and Oholiab. Of Bezaleel, God says to Moses: ‘And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship ...’ (Exod. 31:3). That which would represent the humanity of Christ had to be designed absolutely perfectly, according to the pattern the Lord had shown Moses in the Mount (see Heb. 8:5). Through worship in the tabernacle, the people would begin to experience more fully the process of moral transformation that would only be completed with the triumphant work of Christ, prefigured in the holy tent.

The Spirit of God was not only upon Moses and the well-endowed craftsmen, for He was also influencing the whole people of Israel in a general way all through the centuries, long before the immense change that came with Pentecost. As Swete stated: 'The nation of Israel as a whole had been under the Spirit's guidance from the time of the Exodus. Even the individual Israelite, though not a prophet, might become conscious of the presence of a purifying, uplifting Power which he knew as the Spirit of God's holiness, the princely, supremely good Spirit, which was working in the depths of his being.'³⁸ Then David, in 1 Chronicles 28:11-12, delivered to Solomon 'the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the LoRd.' He says in 2 Samuel 23:2: 'The Spirit of the LoRd spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.' That inspiration would refer not only to the directions for the Temple, but also to the Psalms and other related writings.

The Gift and Personal Relationship

David would not have been unusual in becoming aware of the Spirit's holy disapproval of his sin. He confesses in Psalm 51:10, 11: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy spirit from me.' The entire system of sacrifice, set up through Moses, demonstrated daily the need for confession and cleansing from sin, as the priest laid his hand upon the animal sacrifice, as he confessed the sin of the people.³⁹ Even before the system was fully appointed, on the night of their departure from Egyptian slavery, the people were instructed to 'take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts, and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it [the Passover lamb].'

In other words, David and the other Old Testament believers well knew that a personal relationship with God had to be maintained through a life of confession, renewed faith, and sacrifice. But this was not all from the side of man alone: various texts indicate that this relationship was through the Spirit of God. So, for example, Deuteronomy 30:6 speaks of the spiritual circumcision wrought by God to make these people new creations: 'And the LoRd thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LoRd thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.' While this text does not specify the Spirit of God as the agent

of circumcision, Ezekiel 36:25-27 does so: ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean....A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.’

From such passages, we see that the presence of God is fully in and with His Spirit in this divine work, and also it is at least strongly hinted that the Spirit is in some sense distinguished from God the Father. To employ later theological language, we begin to discern that the Spirit is a distinct *Person*. A person was defined by B. B. Warfield as one who acts with purpose,⁴⁰ and we certainly see His execution of the purposes of God in the redemption of Israel. We also note early evidences of His true personhood in the Deuteronomy reference above to the spiritual circumcision of the elect, as well as in the consciousness of such believers as David, who begged that God would not take His Spirit from him – although this distinction will only be made clear in the New Testament.

The Gift and Prophecy

Nehemiah 9:20 recapitulates the prophetic history of Israel when he says: ‘Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them [the people in the wilderness].’ He goes on to reflect on their hard-heartedness over the years: ‘Yet many years thou didst forebear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets, yet they would not give ear.’

The definition of Prophecy is usefully stated by Joseph Fitzmyer: ‘*Propheteia* is a combination of prep. *pro* “in front of, in place of”, and *phemi*, “speak”, i.e. an utterance made for God; *prophetes*, “one who speaks for someone else,” i.e. a spokesperson or mouthpiece of God, [as in Exod 4:10-16, where Moses, with Aaron’s more eloquent help, speaks for God to Pharaoh].’⁴¹ We see that ‘The prophet is a *man of the Spirit*; the Spirit of God falls upon him, fills his mind, and speaks by his mouth; he finds himself at times dominated by a spiritual force which comes from without and from above.’⁴²

Isaiah 48:16,17 says: ‘Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I; and now the Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me. Thus said the LoRd, thy

Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LoRd thy God which teacheth thee to profit; which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.'

What Micah says in 3:8 would be typical of the prophets: 'But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sin.' The prophet Zechariah declared that the Lord's Spirit would enable the ruler Zerubbabel, and the people of God who would follow him, to rebuild the Temple: 'This is the word of the LoRd unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LoRd of hosts' (4:6).

Haggai 1:14 shows the Lord stirring up the spirits of Zerubbabel and Joshua and the spirit of the remnant of the people. Thus they would finish the work. Zechariah however sees far beyond the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, for he foresees a general cleansing of the people (12:1), and a supernatural outpouring upon them that will make them mourn for what they shall have done to the Messiah: 'And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn' (Zech. 12:10).

Zechariah, complaining of the stubbornness of Israel, shows that they refused to hear both the law, and the Spirit-given words of prophecy: '... and the words which the LoRd of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets; therefore came a great wrath from the LoRd of hosts' (7:12). Numbers 11:29, on the other hand, indicates a massive change for the better. It is in the context of Joshua's concern that Eldad and Medad had prophesied in the camp, as though this would have displaced Moses. Moses replied: '... Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the LoRd's people were prophets, and that the LoRd would put his spirit upon them!' That would happen after the Messiah was glorified, and the Spirit was poured out, so that Peter proclaimed to the whole church: 'ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light' (1 Pet. 2:9).

We have to wait till the New Testament, with the coming down of the Spirit at Pentecost, to gain more insight into how the words of the prophets were at the same time the very words of God. Even there, it is never explained, but we are provided some fuller insight into the way the working

of the Spirit of God caused the words of the prophets (and later the apostles) to be His precise message to His people. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16 that the prophetic words were ‘inspired’, that is, in the original ‘God-breathed’ (in Greek, *theopneustos*) – a divine product which, nevertheless, fully used the personality and circumstances of the inspired writer.

Peter says in 2 Peter 1:20, 21: ‘Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation [that is, a merely personal opinion]. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’ The verb ‘moved’ is, in the Greek, ‘carried along’, that is, the writers of scripture were somehow lifted up and carried by the Holy Spirit so that they wrote precisely what God wanted written, but they did so in their own personal, historical circumstances.

It is never explained to us how this happened, only that God’s Spirit superintended the personality of the writers so that they penned words to the people of God that were ‘inspired’ or ‘God-breathed’. There is no evidence to think that their personalities and their own concerns were violated for this to take place. The psychological mechanics are among the mysteries of God.

A Certain Personal Distinction Indicated

While it is not clarified until the New Testament economy, we can already discern that the Spirit of God is personal – not only in His executing the purposes of God, but also in His presence with the prophets so that they thought and wrote what God intended for His people. He is not merely an impersonal force, but is an acting person from God, who personally interacts with chosen human persons for particular tasks (in this case, speaking and writing). The Spirit comes with mighty power from God to enable the Church (in both Old and New Testaments) to overcome hindrances to the expansion of the Kingdom.

Zechariah 4:6 shows the Word of God announcing that the Spirit will accomplish the task on earth called for by God Himself: ‘Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LoRd unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit, said the LoRd of hosts.’ There does seem to be a certain personal distinction between ‘the Lord of hosts’ and the ‘spirit’ implied here, but we have to go to other

passages to see this distinction more clearly, some in the Old Testament, but especially to the many in the New Testament. Bavinck observes that ‘A threefold self-differentiation in the divine being is most clearly expressed in Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 61:1; 63:9-12, and Haggai 2:5-6’.⁴³

A distinction between God and his Spirit is at least implied in Isaiah 48:16-17: ‘And now the Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent me. Thus saith the LoRd thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LoRd thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go.’ This distinction is less clear, but is still present, I think, in the account of how the Lord instructed Samuel to anoint the young shepherd David to be king of Israel: ‘[David] was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LoRd said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LoRd came upon David from that day forward’ (1 Sam. 16:12-13).

The messianic promise found in Isaiah 61:1-3 (and taken up by Jesus in His first sermon, given in His home town synagogue in Luke 4, where He applies it directly to Himself in verse 21), may be understood to indicate a certain distinction between the Lord and His Spirit, although the personal distinction is not absolutely clear from that passage alone:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LoRd hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LoRd, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Throughout the Old Testament, we discover the role of the Spirit of God as the giver of wisdom, strength and holiness. Bavinck summarizes the spirit-endowed gifts:

The spirit of God is the principle of all life and well-being, of all the gifts and powers in the sphere of revelation; of courage (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 1 Sam. 11:6), of physical strength (Judg. 14:6; 15:14), of artistic skill (Exod. 28:3; 31:31-35; 1 Chron. 28:12-19), of the ability to govern (Num.

11:17, 25; 1 Sam. 16:13), of intellect and wisdom (Job 32:8; Isa. 11:2), of holiness and renewal (Ps. 51:11-12; Isa. 63:10; cf. Gen. 6:3; Neh. 9:20; 1 Sam. 10:6,9), and of prophecy and prediction (Num. 11:25, 29; 24:2-3; Micah 3:8; etc.). The Spirit will rest in an unusual measure upon the Messiah (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1), but afterward be poured out upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29; Isa. 32:1,5; 44:3; Ezek. 36:26-27; 39:29; Zech. 12:10) and give to all a new heart and a new spirit.⁴⁴

This coming of the Spirit to give a new heart and new spirit was a promise central to the New Covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34, and Hebrews chapters 8 and 10). Through this spiritual circumcision, promised and fulfilled, the New Testament states that it results in our taking part in the divine nature: ‘Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust’ (2 Pet. 1:4). That is, the Divine Promiser comes along with His promises of grace and makes us into a new creation. For the Spirit to accomplish such a miracle, He has to be of the high substance of God.

Athanasius constantly brings out the reality that for the Spirit to do such works of God, He has to be God Himself. He frequently states this in his *Ad Serapionem*. For instance, in Epistle One, section 24, he writes: ‘Further it is through the Spirit that we are all said to be partakers of God. For it says: “Know ye not that ye are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” ... If the Holy Spirit were a creature, we should have no participation of God in him.’

Old Testament Adumbrations of a Plurality of Persons within God

What would be called by the later New Testament and Patristic Trinitarian theology ‘hypostatic’ [or ‘personal’] distinctions within the Godhead have been understood by many Christian theologians to have been adumbrated in the Old Testament usage of the names of God. The sixteenth-century Swiss Reformer, Heinrich Bullinger, held that the Hebraic employment of both singular and plural verbs to express the being and activity of God indicates a distinct plurality of persons within *Elohim*.⁴⁵

George A. F. Knight, a twentieth-century scholar, argues the same point: ‘We must just accept the fact of the word’s [i.e. *Adhonai*] being a plural and in consequence a manifest parallel in usage to the common word for God in Hebrew, viz. *Elohim*. There are, indeed, singular words for God. *Elohah* is said to occur 57 times, almost always in poetry or very late prose *Elohim* is used most peculiarly (from our point of view) to cover an aspect of the Godhead which is specifically Hebraic, viz., the conception that God is both singular EL and plural *Elohim* at one and the same time ...’⁴⁶

But if a certain distinction within the one God is implied by such usage, then we could ask, why was it not mentioned by the rabbinical scholars? George Knight answers: ‘Let us dismiss out of hand some of the “explanations” of this peculiar phenomenon of a plural word for God made by exegetes whose premises were consciously or unconsciously firmly planted on the speculative approach of the Greeks. Some have suggested, for example, that the word is a plural of majesty. But that is surely to read into Hebrew speech a modern way of thinking. The kings of Israel and Judah are all addressed in the singular in our biblical records. Or again, I have seen the suggestion that here we have the “we” of the newspaper editor!’⁴⁷

A Change within Judaism?

We can note the suggestion from N. T. Wright that it was not until after the rise of Christianity that Judaism began to interpret monotheism as an absolute numerical oneness of God’s being: ‘Within the most fiercely monotheistic circles throughout [this] period – from the Maccabean revolt to Bar-Kochba – there is no suggestion that “monotheism”, or praying the *Shema*, had anything to do with the numerical analysis of the inner being of Israel’s God himself. It had everything to do with the two-pronged fight against paganism and dualism. Indeed, we find strong evidence during this period of Jewish groups and individuals who, speculating on the meaning of some difficult passages in scripture (Daniel 7, for example, or Genesis 1), suggested that the divine being might encompass a plurality.⁴⁸ Philo could speculate about the Logos as, effectively, a second divine being [*de Som.* I. 229] It was only with the rise of Christianity, and arguably under the influence both of polemical constraint and Hellenizing philosophy, that

Jews in the second and subsequent centuries reinterpreted “monotheism” as “the numerical oneness of the divine being”.⁴⁹

Augustin Lémann, a Jewish scholar who became a Roman Catholic Abbe, wrote a book showing the serious changes within the synagogue concerning the Messiah and God Himself, in the late Old Testament period, and in the Apocryphal writings. His late nineteenth-century study is marked with exegetical care and theological precision. Among other changes, he demonstrates that the synagogue backed away from the divinity of the Messiah, and from His redemptive suffering, in the direction of His being seen as a secular warrior and victor. This resulted in a very different picture of the Christ.⁵⁰ It was part of ‘the numerical oneness of the divine being’.

Why the Slowness in Revealing Clearly the Trinity?

It is only with the New Testament that we find the Trinity, including the distinct personhood and full Godhood of the Holy Spirit, openly manifested. As G. Vos correctly states: ‘Premature disclosure of the Trinity would in all probability have proved a temptation to polytheism. For a long time the Deity of the Messiah and the personality of the Holy Spirit were kept more or less in the background.’⁵¹

While that is true, B. B. Warfield shows even more plainly why this disclosure had to wait for the right time:

The real reason for the delay in the revelation of the Trinity, however, is grounded in the secular development of the redemptive purpose of God. The times were not ripe for the revelation of the Trinity in the unity of the Godhead until the fullness of the time had come for God to send His Son unto redemption, and His Spirit unto sanctification. This revelation in word must needs wait upon the revelation in deed, to which it brings its necessary explanation, no doubt, but from which it derives its own entire significance and value.⁵²

Gregory Nazianzus had much the same insight in the fourth century:

For it was not safe, when the Godhead of the Father was not yet acknowledged, plainly to proclaim the Son; nor when that of the Son was not yet received, to burden us further (if I may use so bold an expression) with the Holy Spirit; lest perhaps people might, like men loaded with food

beyond their strength, and presenting eyes as yet too weak to bear it to the sun's light, risk the loss of even that which was within the reach of their powers; but that by gradual additions, and as David says, goings up, and advances and progress from glory to glory; the Light of the trinity might shine upon the more illuminated.⁵³

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1. H. Bavinck, op. cit., p. 261.
 2. Gregory Nazianzus, op. cit., *The Fifth Theological Oration*, XXVII.
 3. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament: A Study of Primitive Christian Teaching* (MacMillan and Co. Limited: London, 1919), p. 1.
 4. Ibid., p. 2.
 5. Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 49-51.
 6. G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis, Volume 1*, Translated by William Heynen (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1981), p. 54.
 7. Wolfgang Capito, *Hexameron, Sive Opus Sex Dierum* (Argentinae [Strasburg], 1539), p. 36.
 8. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Volume I* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids MI, 1965), p. 50.
 9. Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, Translated by David E. Green (William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), p. 4.
 10. Von Rad, op. cit., pp. 49, 50.
 11. E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.: Philadelphia, Pa, 1964), pp. 36-42.
 12. Ibid., p. 37.
 13. Pierre Viret, *L' Exposition du Symbole des Apôtres*, in *Instruction Chrétienne, Tome Troisième* (L'Âge d'Homme: Lausanne, 2013), p. 547 (My translation).
 14. Ibid., p. 359.
 15. Numbers 11:29.
 16. Judges 3:10.
 17. Judges 12:29.
 18. Judges 13:24,25; 14:6.
 19. Psalm 51:11.
 20. Psalm 143:10.
 21. Isaiah 61:1.
 22. Isaiah 30:1.
 23. Isaiah 48:16.
 24. Isaiah 59:19.
 25. Isaiah 63:9,10.

26. Ezekiel 11:24.
27. Not in the Masoretic nor Septuagintal text of the canonical book of Daniel, but it is found in The First Letter to Serapion, Chapter 5: from Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical additions to Daniel: Susannah 45-46.
28. Not found in the canonical book of Micah. But perhaps abstracted from Micah 3:8-12.
29. Joel 2:28.
30. Zechariah 1:6.
31. Zechariah 7:12.
32. Athanasius, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 33.
33. Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 262.
34. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 16.38.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Viret, *op. cit.*, p. 402.
37. John Owen, *Hebrews volume 6: Exposition of Hebrews chapters 8.1–10.39, The Works of John Owen, volume XXII* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 266, 267.
38. Swete, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
39. E.g. see Leviticus 4:1-12, especially noting verses 4 and 6: ‘And he shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LoRd, and shall lay his hand upon the bullock’s head, and kill the bullock before the LoRd And the priest shall dip his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the LoRd, before the vail of the sanctuary.’
40. See Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan). He writes: ‘For person means purpose: precisely what distinguishes a person from a thing is that its modes of action are purposive, that all it does is directed to an end and proceeds through the choice of means to that end’ (p. 14).
41. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: The Anchor Yale Bible* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008), p. 467.
42. Swete, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
43. Bavinck, *op. cit.*, p. 264.
44. Bavinck, *op. cit.*, pp. 263, 264.
45. Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades: The Fourth Decade* (Cambridge at the University Press: Parker Society, 1851), *The Third Decade*, pp. 134, 135.
46. George A. F. Knight, *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* in ‘Scottish Journal of Theology’ Occasional Papers, No. 1 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1953), pp. 19, 20.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
48. Wright refers to Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), and Lapide and Moltmann, *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine: A Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981). Quoted in N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 34ff.
49. Wright, *ibid.*
50. Abbé Augustin Lémann, *Histoire complète de l’Idée Messianique chez le peuple d’Israel* (Jois M. Desbonnet: Ghent, Belgium, 1974 reprint). See especially pages 262-339.
51. G. Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980), p. 73.
52. B. B. Warfield, ‘The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity’ in *Biblical Foundations*, p. 143.

53. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 31, p. 26.

CHAPTER 2

THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

God gives the gift of Himself to His people. The Father and the Son send down the Holy Spirit to enable us to grasp who He is. The infinite Spirit lowers Himself to our finite spirits so that we may know Him in the bonds of eternal salvation. The mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Holy Trinity means that the Spirit, who is breathed on the disciples by Christ, makes them share in the being and work of their Mediator in the accomplishments of His holy life, successful temptations, atoning death and glorious resurrection on their behalf. What the Holy Spirit does in Jesus is the basis of the new creation of a resurrection people.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

It takes the Incarnation of the Son of God for the powerful hints given in the Old Testament concerning the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit to be filled out, so that they become more fully experienced and, thus, understandable to us and for us. T. F. Torrance explains this necessity: 'For the Jews it is finally only in the light of what has taken place in God's incarnate self-revelation in Christ in fulfilment of his covenant promises to Israel that distinctive features in the knowledge of God given in the Old Testament itself unfold their full significance.'¹

The glory of true Christianity is that GOD gives HIMSELF! The Father gives the Son, the Father and Ascended Son give the Holy Spirit, and in that glorious context, the love of the Father Himself 'is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us' (Rom. 5:5). Thus, the Holy Spirit, who does not possess His own image (or *eikon*), is precisely fit for the grace and beauty of the image or form of both the Father and the Son to shine through him.²

The Gift and the Gift: It takes knowledge of each one for us to know the other

Whether or not it would be considered a paradox, I am not certain, but we find in the fulness of the New Testament revelation that the two great gifts from the Father to His people both have to be experienced for us to know the other. Here is the paradox (if paradox it be): it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to know Christ, and it is only in Christ that we can know the Spirit. John 3:16 speaks of the gift of the Son. It says that 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

And then in John chapter 14:16, Jesus speaks of the Spirit as the gift of the Father through his own prayer: 'And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.' This Comforter testifies to who Jesus is: 'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you' (John 14:26). That is, it takes the incarnate Christ to send the Comforter from His Father, and at the same time, a major function of that Holy Spirit is to teach us who Jesus is.

In John 16, the Lord shows the marvelous characteristic of the Holy Spirit, (so different from us, self-absorbed humans), for He does not speak of Himself, but rather, shines the light upon the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you' (John 16:13-15).

The hypostatical aptness of the Spirit to enter our human hypostases

By 'hypostatical', we mean 'personal'; that is, it is a major aspect of the very being of the Holy Spirit, by being who He is, to be able to show the Father and the Son, while remaining Himself invisible.

As T. F. Torrance writes:

... the Holy Spirit is not directly known in his own *hypostasis* for he remains veiled by the very revelation of the Father and the Son which he brings. He is the invisible Spirit of truth sent from the Father in the name of the Son, not in his own personal name as the holy Spirit, and thus does not speak of himself but speaks of the Father and of the Son what he receives from them. He does not show us himself, and so the world cannot receive him or know him. He shows us the face of the Father in the Son, and shows us the face of the Son in the Father He is the invisible light in whose shining we see the uncreated light of God, manifest in Jesus Christ.³

Torrance goes on to quote Basil's *De spiritu sancto* (22f; 46f.): 'Our mind enlightened by the Spirit, looks toward the Son, and in him as in an image, sees the Father.'⁴ It is no wonder that some have called the Holy Spirit 'the humility of God'.

Let us think of what the double blessing of the two Gifts means in terms of traditional biblical teaching about salvation. Only the Holy Spirit can bring us to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:11-16:

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but by the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Later in this epistle, Paul cries out: 'Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed; and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost' (1 Cor. 12:3).

We have already seen how Jeremiah, speaking to Old Testament believers, described the central promise of the New Covenant as a spiritual circumcision, in which God's law was placed within their hearts, so that

God was their God, and they were His people, and their sins were forgiven (Jer. 31:31-34, compare Heb. 8:10-13; 10:15-17). After expounding that very passage in Jeremiah to early Christians, the writer to the Hebrews then insists that to deny this greatest of all gifts is to do 'despite unto the Spirit of grace' (Heb. 10:29).

In the same way, that is why Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ... The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:5 and 8).

However, at the same time, we do not know the Spirit in His own image or *eikon*. He hides Himself behind the person of Christ, and so it is only in and through Christ that we truly know Him. Father Dumitru Staniloae explains:

The Holy Spirit comes as a hypostasis because He rested with hypostatic plenitude in the Lord's ascended body. The Spirit as hypostasis was able to manifest Himself to us only in Christ's body, which became transparent to God's infinite and fully intensive depths in their work for us. Only in His quality as hypostasis does the Spirit make the presence of His divine activity felt in all its power....The Spirit's full transparence...is due to the complete pneumatization of the Lord's body; this pneumatization also makes Christ better felt as a hypostasis Therefore the Spirit's full transparence is at the same time a spiritual transparence and a greatly increased intensity of Christ's presence.⁵

By 'hypostasis', Staniloae means the personal reality of the third Member of the Trinity. He is One who does not show Himself, but rather, by His own nature, He manifests who the Father and the Son are. As the Son's body was glorified, and thereby made a transparent vehicle of the infinite Godhead, the supernatural reality of the presence of the risen Christ is all the more vouchsafed to us. The invisible one, the Holy Spirit, hence makes visible – or graspable – the reality of Christ Himself within believers. It takes a 'lowering' [*kenosis*] of the Spirit for this to happen.

Staniloae continues his explanation:

There is a kenosis of the Spirit, who descends to our level in order to raise us up to the level of being Christ's partners. The Spirit is not a hypostasis with a distinct human nature, which means that He is not incarnate as we are or as Christ is, and therefore there is nothing that hinders Him from infusing Himself as hypostasis into our hypostases, becoming a sort of hypostasis of our persons. This makes Him even closer to us We do all these things through the Spirit, who incorporates us without nullifying us....By descending to the level of the human 'I', the Spirit becomes humble in a human fashion so that the human person may also humble himself, and that through humility he may be exalted.⁶

Others have expressed the same insight. T. F. Torrance, for instance, writes similarly concerning the distinct hypostatical aptness of the Holy Spirit to enter our human hypostases and transform them from within.⁷

There is a good reason why it is the Holy Spirit in particular who interpenetrates our human spirits. He is an infinite Spirit, and we are finite spirits. Therefore, it is no surprise that He who is infinite supreme Spirit knows exactly how to come inside our created spirits, and renew us from the inside out, without destroying us in order to do so. Thus, the High and Holy One lowers Himself to come down into our frail beings, and we can perceive how His down coming does not destroy us.

We might find an implied reference to this non-destructive coming down in Psalm 110. The messianic Psalm 110 does not distinguish between the Lord and His Spirit, but it would not be far off the mark to assume that verse 3 is probably speaking of that inwardly-renewing power, so frequently attributed elsewhere in the Scriptures to the Holy Spirit: 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.' The Lord makes His people willing 'from the inside out', thus renewing their personality into a state of holy beauty, reflecting the character of God, by way of the communication of his Spirit. Part of this beauty is wishing to do the very will of God.

On the other hand, as we shall later see, it is certainly the case in the writings of the Apostle Paul, that he speaks similarly of both 'Christ in you', as well as 'you in Christ', and 'the Spirit in you' (cf. Galatians 2:20: 'Christ liveth in me ...'; Galatians 3:2: '... Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?'; Ephesians 3:17: 'Christ in

you'; 4:30: 'the Spirit in you'; Philippians 2:1: 'consolation in Christ ... fellowship of the Spirit, etc.'). These expressions all speak in their own way of the indwelling of Christ in His people.

The Gift gives the Gift

While the breathing out of the Spirit by Christ on Resurrection Day and later at Pentecost will be discussed later, here I merely wish to introduce the issue of 'the Gift giving the Gift'. On the evening of Resurrection Day, the risen Lord communicated His Spirit to the gathered disciples. 'And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost' (John 20:22). And later, on the epochal day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came down upon the early church, and filled them, so that cloven tongues of fire sat upon their heads, and they spoke with other tongues. He had come from the ascended Christ: 'Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of God the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear' (Acts 2:33). Thus the Gift gives the Gift!

In John 14: 23 Christ promises the believers: 'If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' This is an illustration of the ancient dogmatic term *perichoresis* (i.e. where one person of the Trinity is present and working, the others are there also – something like *mutual indwelling*).⁸ Augustine writes: 'For we have already shown by many modes of speech in the divine Scriptures, that, in this Trinity, what is said of each is also said of all, on account of the indivisible working of the one and same substance.'⁹

The Holy Spirit is given to equip the Messiah fully to give Himself

We have noted over and again that we can perceive who the Spirit is only in Christ, not in the Spirit Himself (cf. John 16:13: 'For he shall not speak of himself ...'). Therefore, we must look to Christ's coming among us to see who the Spirit of God is. Two passages in the New Testament reveal the Incarnation of the eternal Son of God in the flesh, by way of the Virgin Birth: Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 2:3-21.

The first passage (in Matthew 1) shows the Virgin Birth to be a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 ('... Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear

a son, and shall call his name Immanuel’).¹⁰ Matthew makes clear that the Virgin Mary was a chosen young woman, who had not had relations with a man. She was engaged to Joseph, and before they were married and came together, she had become pregnant. The Lord sent an angel to explain the meaning of this to Joseph and told him to name the miracle child ‘Jesus’ (related to Joshua or ‘the LoRd’ – i.e. Yahveh or ‘Jehovah’ saves’). Matthew says that His name also is Immanuel (or ‘God with us’).

Matthew 1:18 clearly says that ‘she was found with child of the Holy Ghost’. The second account of the Virgin Birth in Luke 1 states, in answer to the question of the Virgin to the angel: ‘How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?’ (v. 34), that ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’ Earlier in Luke 1:32, the angel had said: ‘He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest ...’

This child would be conceived without the intervention of a human male: a first-order miracle. I. Howard Marshall paraphrases Luke 1:34, showing ‘The Holy Spirit, [is] here equated in poetic parallelism with the power of God ...’¹¹ Luke 1:35 then equates the Holy Spirit with ‘the Power of the Highest’. Marshall writes: ‘*ho hupistos* is a title for God found frequently in the LXX, where it is equivalent to ‘*el ‘elyon* ...’¹² This indicates either (1) that the Holy Spirit is the most high God, working this miracle, or (2) it could mean that the Most High God, without regard to His personal distinctions, is entirely involved in the Virgin Birth; or it could mean both.

William Hendricksen and other commentators have connected this ‘overshadowing’ in the holy conception to the concept of the overshadowing that occurred in the coming down of the Shekinah glory over the Tabernacle upon the Ark of the Covenant.¹³ As the Shekinah glory came down first upon the Tabernacle erected in the wilderness (Exod. 40:34–35), then upon the completed Temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 5:13–14; 7:3), so now it overshadows Jesus, whose very body constitutes the new Temple (John 2:20–22). And so as the Shekinah glory had departed from the Temple in the time of Ezekiel (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:22–23), never to return, neither in its rebuilding under Ezra, nor in the centuries of the intertestamental period, so now it descends upon Jesus at His baptism (Matt. 3:16–17).

The self-giving of *perichoresis*

We keep in mind here the truth of *perichoresis* (or ‘mutual indwelling’), which shows that where one Person of the Trinity is at work, the others are there also. For example, in John 5, after Christ was criticized for breaking the Sabbath and for making God His Father (vv. 16 and 18), He replied in verse 17: ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.’ Then He adds a further explanation of the Father/Son relationship, both in activity (19-25) and being (26):

... the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, the Son doeth likewise. For the Father loveth the Son and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew greater works than these that ye may marvel For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me (John 5:19-20, 30).

In answer to Philip’s request for Jesus to show him the Father, he answers: ‘Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works’ sake At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you’ (John 14:9-11, 20).

This mutual indwelling is the same with the Holy Spirit and the other persons of the Godhead. The Spirit brings the very knowledge of God Himself into the believer. For the Spirit to be there is for God the Father to be there, as we see in 1 Corinthians 2:10-12. Hence, when the Holy Spirit is brought to the fore in the miraculous conception of Christ, we are to understand that the entire Godhead is involved, albeit in a mysterious way.

It is not unlike what Augustine’s question: ‘which of the Three Persons’ was in the cloudy, fiery pillar, leading the children of Israel? To which he replies, ‘But it is not similarly apparent whether [it was] the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, or the Trinity itself, the one God. Nor is this distinguished there either, in my judgment, where it is written, “The glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud ...”’¹⁴ However, in the narrative of the holy conception, clearly the Holy Spirit is mentioned first, though, by definition, the entire Trinity would not be excluded.

The Holy Spirit's giving in the miraculous conception starts the New Creation

As we have noted, *‘El ‘Elyon* is either equivalent to the Holy Spirit, or certainly includes Him. While His holy working here is ineffable, we are given a hint of what was occurring when Luke uses the phrase in 1:35, ‘The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee ...’ It is also an analogy to the ‘hovering’ of the Spirit of God over the waters in the original creation (Gen. 1:2), ordering the cosmos into the beauty of the Kingdom of God presented as the life of Eden. The verb for ‘hovering’ also occurs in the Song of Moses in Deut. 32:11, where it extends the Spirit’s ordering work from the physical realities of creation into the inner life of God’s Covenant people, as they are redeemed so as to fulfill the Edenic call to extend the dominion of the Kingdom of God throughout the cosmos. The Spirit draws His people out of the ‘wasted howling wilderness’ of exile into the life-giving wonder of the New Creation pictured again as the Garden of Eden given in the Promised Land. Psalm 104:30 points us to the Spirit’s work as life-giver: ‘Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.’

As the Spirit worked in the original creation, it is highly appropriate that He is at work in the conception of Him who will be the head of the new creation. 1 Corinthians 15:45-46 may shed light here on the Spirit, who, with the Father and the Son, worked one way in the old creation, and another – and higher – way in the new creation: ‘And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.’ Why should the Spirit have such prominence in the miraculous conception leading up to the Virgin Birth? The answer of Karl Barth is, I think, convincing:

But why is it precisely God the Holy Spirit who is named here? ... The Holy Spirit is God Himself in His freedom exercised in revelation to be present to His creature, even to dwell in Him personally, and thereby to achieve His meeting with Himself in His Word, and by this achievement to make it possible The very possibility of human nature’s being adopted into unity with the Son of God is the Holy Ghost ...¹⁵

John Calvin properly noted that ‘we make Christ free of all stain not just because he was begotten of his mother without copulation with man, but because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam’s fall.’¹⁶

Although He generally hides Himself, we can trace ‘the perfecting work’ of the Holy Spirit as we are gradually given more details in Scripture of how He is bringing to pass the eternal plan of God in space and time. We see Him ‘hovering over’ the inchoate waters of creation;

He imparts wisdom for governance to the Judges; comes in the anointing of prophet, priest, and king; guides Moses in the Exodus, and assists in the wilderness wanderings of Israel; grants practical wisdom to skilled craftsmen in preparing the Tabernacle; is involved in the spiritual circumcision of His elect people; works in the sacrificial system, and re-establishes God’s relationship with sinners, like David; inspires the holy prophets, and the writers of the Wisdom Literature; and then, at the apex of His perfecting tasks, overshadows the Virgin Mary in her holy conception, so that her Son is denominated ‘that holy thing’ – i.e. sinless, although fully human. Later, we shall study how the Holy Spirit will help raise the bodies of the Christians on the Last Day (Rom. 8:11), and His part in the great events of the Eschaton, as he from the Throne sends out lightnings and thunders’ in office as ‘sevenfold’ Spirit of God (a number indicating absolute perfection) in Revelation 4:5.

So, as the light cast upon the Holy Spirit grows with the development of the Scriptures, we find Him throughout its pages perfecting God’s plan. To do so, he must be especially close to material reality, and thereby shapes it in God’s fore-planned direction. From the turning of the miry creational state into a beautiful cosmos, from guiding the people of God through slavery and national freedom, from guiding the structure of Tabernacle worship to equipping kings, workmen and prophets for their task of constructing the Kingdom of God from an imperfect state towards a more perfect one; from spiritual circumcision of the heart of God’s people, to helping in the Incarnation of their Saviour, and then to the raising and transforming of their bodies, we find the Spirit of God ever bringing the created order, through its redemption, to a perfected order of consummation. That is who He is: the executive agent of the Holy Trinity, who takes His time organizing all material and spiritual reality to that final state where the God, who is Spirit (John 4:24), will be delighted, and

according to Zephaniah 3:17, 'he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.'

But to reach that point of supreme bliss, the Holy Spirit must minister to and through the humanity of Christ, for He is the Head of the New Creation, and upon Him utterly depends the transformation of the cosmos. The Holy Spirit anointed the humanity of Jesus to enable Him to achieve all of His saving work. There is then a parallel between the shaping of material elements into an ordered cosmos, and the inclusion of the human race into the humanity of Christ, whereby it will reach God's goal for it.

The Spirit anoints Jesus

Hebrews 1:3 relates the highest possible state of Christ in His eternal relation to God, and to the created order which He purged: 'Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high' But verse 9 goes on to speak of His anointing: 'Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.'

We may assume, I think, that His love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity inhered in His Godness, as the eternal Son. But something else was appropriate in His state of humanity for Him to accomplish His redeeming work. That work was being our Mediator, delivering us from sin and temptation, and – in our flesh – overcoming death, the last enemy (cf. Heb. 2:9-11; 14-18). To go through all of this, the Father anointed the One who would go down into the darkest places of suffering and death, with 'the oil of joy'. Christ experienced that unction of gladness even as He faced the horrendous death of the cross. According to Hebrews 12:2: 'Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross ...'

Matthew 12:17-21 quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 in describing this unction:

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax

shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Pierre Courthial shows the outcome of this unction/baptism:

Certainly because of his incarnation, Jesus was already full of the Holy Spirit, by whom, in his human nature, he grew in wisdom and in grace. But upon his baptism/unction by John in Jordan, Jesus received ordination/consecration in view of his public ministry as Mediator, in which he was entering this very moment. He was already the Mediator, but secretly. But now he would give testimony and open demonstration during the next two, or at most, three years, until the accomplishment of his whole human life, and his entire ministry, right up to the cross, where he would seal the Gospel with his blood, by sacrifice which would cost him the infernal and horrible step of being separated from God.¹⁷

This means that although He was always God, in virtue of being the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the unction of the Holy Spirit sealed His vicarious humanity to accomplish the infinitely powerful acts of redemption called for from our Mediator. This involved His utter holiness of person and act, including at last the supreme sacrifice of His own blood, by which He saved all who would ever believe in Him. In all of this, He stood in for them: His holy life in place of their sin, and His salvific atonement in total payment of their sins, and hence, removal of all their guilt.

The Holy Spirit in Jesus' childhood

Granted His unusual wisdom with the Law of God when He was talking to the doctors of Israel in the Temple at age of twelve (Luke 2:41-49), it is no wonder that immediately before that event, Luke 2:40 says that 'And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.' Luke 2:47 says about the doctors of the Law on that day: 'And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.' That wisdom and grace on the twelve-year-old was surely related to the messianic promise in Isaiah 11:1-3: 'There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the LoRd shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of

the LoRd; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LoRd ...’ It should not surprise us to discover that the phrase ‘shall make him of quick understanding in’ is simply a translation of the word *Ruach* from the Hebrew. Namely it is the Spirit (*Ruach*) that so interpenetrates Jesus that He is led to the perfection of the ‘Fear of the Lord’, bringing mankind to the riches of eternal wisdom thereby (Job 28:28, Prov. 1:7, and hence 1 Cor. 1:30).

Moreover, Hebrews 1:9, which – as we just noted – speaks of His anointment with ‘the oil of joy’, is not, in that text, limited to any one phase of His incarnate life. It presumably goes from His involvement in creation long before His incarnation (Heb. 2:10) to the final renewal of the universe (cf. Heb. 2:11-12). And John 3:34 states: ‘... for God giveth not the Spirit to him by measure.’ Why would these passages not have included His childhood?

Pierre Courthial expresses the holy attitude of Jesus during His growth to manhood: ‘Soon Jesus was “filled with wisdom”; that wisdom which is rooted in the fear of God (Psalm 111:10), and of the carrying out of its directives from the Torah (Deuteronomy 4:6). He was the Second Adam, the Adam of the New Covenant; of the Covenant entirely made new; he did not wish to do anything but by that grace from which he lived his human life.’¹⁸

The Spirit in Jesus’ Baptism

Upon His baptism at the hands of His cousin, John the Baptist, in the Jordan river, the Incarnate Son of God entered into His public ministry. Matthew 3:16-17 describes the divine event of His supernatural anointing: ‘And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

The very fact that Jesus chose to be baptized publicly is a strong indication of the nature of His ministry. Baptism was for sinners, as the ministry of John the Baptist shows: ‘Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins’ (Matt. 3:5, 6). Precisely because baptism was to mark repentance from sins, John at first refused to baptize his cousin.

Somehow he already knew of the holiness of Jesus. It is likely that his mother Elizabeth had told him enough about Jesus for him to be aware of that highly significant fact.

But Jesus conveyed to John that His baptism was a way of fulfilling the righteousness of God (Matt. 3:13). It signifies the vicarious nature of the ministry of Jesus: He, the sinless one, voluntarily chooses to stand in the place of sinners, and to bear their load of guilt. John would have known well Isaiah 53:6: ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LoRd hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.’

It is as though Jesus is repenting of sins He never committed, in order to stand in for a guilty race, whose repentance must depend upon His vicarious actions in their place, beginning with the repentance that they owe. It is already a vivid illustration of the crucial Gospel truth of 2 Corinthians 5:21: ‘For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.’

John, therefore, went ahead with the baptism of his holy cousin (at whose hands, John said that he himself ought to be baptized – Matthew 3:14). Upon His baptism, the heavenly Father directly and openly intervenes. Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:21 both state that ‘the heavens were opened’. As Howard Marshall writes: ‘The opening of the heavens is an indication that divine revelation is about to take place The significance is that after a period of apparent inactivity God himself comes down to act in power.’¹⁹

The heavens were opened in order for the Spirit of God to ‘descend like a dove’ (Matt. 3:16). Luke 3:22 shows that descending like a dove means more than merely flying down as a dove descends. Rather, ‘The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him ...’

Church Fathers and biblical commentators over the generations have discussed why the Holy Spirit took the form of a dove. This text does not specifically tell us, but in general it has been plausibly suggested that the dove is probably related to the picture of the dove who flew back to Noah’s Ark, to show that the Flood was receding (Gen. 8:8-12). According to Marshall: ‘... if John’s baptism was intended to symbolize the coming flood of judgment ... so recalling the flood of Noah (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21), for then the dove would signify the end of judgment and the beginning of a new era of grace ...’²⁰

Purity and gentleness have also been associated by commentators with the form of the dove. If so, then it was an appropriate image for ‘the Holy One of Israel’, whose divine gentleness and patience would overcome the fierce onslaughts of Satan. In terms of the divinity and humanity of our Mediator, we could say that while His infinite purity and longsuffering are already characteristics of His deity, the human nature He vicariously assumes for His people stands in need of the continued purity and patience imparted by the ministration of the Holy Spirit who came upon Him. Hebrews 5:7-9 reflects the painful, but perfect meeting of this need of His humanity, as He stands in for us, and bends our human natures back to God: ‘Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him ...’

The Opening of the Heavens

Then from the open heavens, a voice said: ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ (Matt. 3:17). Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:21 both state that ‘the heavens were opened’. In Mark 1:10, when Jesus came out of the baptismal waters, ‘he saw the heavens opened ...’ The Greek verb *schizo* is used, and it occurs only one other time in the Gospel, at the death of Jesus, with the veil of the Temple being ‘ripped open’ (Mark 15:38). This opening gives way to the outshining of the glory of God. One can connect the Shekinah glory, which manifested the presence of the LORD in the Old Testament, to the Spirit resting upon Jesus, the living Temple, whose body constitutes the redeemed Church. In the end, Jesus’ complete union with fallen humanity in both His baptism and death, opens, as it were, the Holy of Holies so that the Redeeming Power of the Shekinah Glory of the LoRd can flow out onto needy humanity bringing New Creation.

As Augustine and others pointed out, if we want to find the Trinity, we must go to the Jordan river, for there we find the Son being baptized, the Holy Spirit descending upon Him like a dove, and the voice of the Father affirming the Son. This affirmation of divine sonship is related to Psalm 2:7, and also to Isaiah 42:1, thus constituting a New Testament fulfillment

of the Old Testament promises of messianic sonship that awaited the incarnation of Christ.

We may recap the true identity of Jesus Christ by contrasting the Biblical teaching with the heretical ideas of the ‘Adoptionists’.²¹ Not willing to accept His eternal deity, some of them claimed that He was ‘adopted’ at His baptism, and others said that He was adopted as Son of God only at His resurrection. But according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, He was always the Son of God, as His eternal Son; co-equal to the Father. The Father proclaimed Christ’s eternal Sonship at His baptism, as well as later on the Mount of Transfiguration. His Sonship is prophetically announced by Isaiah, in one of his Servant Songs which makes Him head of all the elect – both Jew and Gentile: ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles’ (Isa. 42:1). Thus, the Spirit was given to enable the Mediator to fulfill His mighty task. It is of note here that the Holy Spirit interpenetrates the Mediator at this exact point in the inauguration of His earthly ministry, overshadowing Him with the Shekinah Glory of God’s Temple Presence so that He may fulfill the role of Prophet, Priest and King of God’s New Covenant people.

The Holy Spirit and the Temptations of Christ

The Gospel accounts indicate that right after His baptism, the Lord was ‘led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil’ (Matt. 4:1; cf. Luke 4:1). Mark uses a very strong word here concerning the Holy Spirit and Christ: ‘And immediately the Spirit *driveth* him into the wilderness’ (Mark 1:12). The One who anointed Him in Jordan, now drives Him into the wilderness of temptation, to prepare Him for the rest of His ministry. Another synoptic gospel also indicates the Spirit’s guidance to Jesus as He entered into temptation (Luke 4:1).

Both Gospel writers use the word (*ago*), but there is a starkness and intensity in Mark’s language in that he uses *ekballo* to describe Christ’s being ‘driven’ or literally ‘cast out’ into the wilderness. For this wilderness exile where Jesus confronts the ‘prince of this world’ (John 14:30), doing battle with the ‘lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life’ (1 John 2:16) is absolutely crucial in sowing the life of New Creation for His people. His people may likewise be ‘driven’ by the Spirit into this

wilderness. Athanasius so speaks of Antony's years in the desert caves of Egypt doing battle with the spiritual powers of darkness through the Words of the Psalms sung with 'faith in the Lord' (*Life of Antony*, section 8-13) so that he may later emerge 'filled with the Spirit of God' with 'grace in speaking' such that he brings healing with his words 'exhorting all to prefer the love of Christ before all that is in the world' (*Life of Antony*, section 14).²²

So Jesus' public ministry began with a massive battle against the powers of the evil kingdom. He had to win in order to be victorious in all the rest of His ministry as Head of His Church. This is the successful background, painful though it was, to His victory over the powers throughout the rest of His ministry, culminating in Gethsemane and Calvary. And the devil, knowing the importance of this struggle, worked with all his might to 'derail' Christ.

We must see Jesus here in his office as 'last Adam' (or 'second Adam'). He is (as Saint Irenaeus called it) 'recapitulating' the failed work of the first Adam. Irenaeus wrote:

For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning, but when he became incarnate, and was made man, he commenced afresh the long line of human being, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam – namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God – that we might recover in Christ.²³

Elsewhere Irenaeus adds:

... and because death reigned over the flesh, it was right that through the flesh it should lose its force and let man go free from its oppression. So *the Word was made flesh* that through that very flesh which sin had ruled and domesticated, it should lose its force and no longer be in us.²⁴

The first Adam gave in to the temptation of Satan to rebel against God, and in him the entire human race fell from God and became prey to Satan (cf. Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-21). We are not told how much Satan knows, but evidently he realized that Christ was the second Adam, chosen to establish a new, redeemed race, who would love and trust God, and thus reject the kingdom of evil. Hence he came forth to use all his malign powers against

the second Adam, fondly hoping to cause Him to fall from His Father, and come over to the side of pure evil.²⁵

And yet it seems that Christ was actually more the aggressor against Satan at this beginning of His ministry, than vice versa. It appears that the Holy Spirit was in charge of the timing of this conflict, as is suggested by Mark 1:12, so Jesus goes forth to battle in the barren wilderness. Irenaeus has it right: ‘He [God the Father] sent his creative word, who in coming to deliver us, came to the very place and spot in which we had lost life ... and hallowed our birth and destroyed death, loosing those same fetters in which we were enchained.’²⁶

The sixteenth-century Scottish Reformer, John Knox, graphically depicted how Christ provoked the devil to battle: ‘Lo, I am a man like to my brethren, having flesh and blood, and all properties of man’s nature, sin, which is thy venom, excepted. Tempt, try; and assault me, I offer thee here a place most convenient – the wilderness – there shall be no mortal creature to comfort me against thy assaults; thou shalt have time sufficient to do what thou canst; I shall not fly the place of battle ...’²⁷

The temptations of the evil one against the second Adam were somewhat like the one he raised against the first Adam [Do not trust God’s word, but do what I say – cf. Gen. 3:4, 5], and then, more particularly, against God’s adopted son, Israel, in his wilderness journeyings. It has been noted from ancient times that the answers of Jesus to the temptations of Satan all come from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16, and 6:13).

Each one of the temptations is related to a specific event in Israel’s history as they passed through the desert. J. Dupont shows that the quotations Christ draws from Deuteronomy are used in the *inverse* position (i.e. from the later to the earlier, but in that ‘backwards’ way), Matthew’s account of the order of these sayings in answer to each of the temptations actually gives the true historical order of what happened in the Exodus: the episode of giving of the manna, the miracle of water from the rock after bitter complaint, and the entry into Canaan.²⁸ I have dealt elsewhere with the different order of temptations used by Luke.²⁹

The first temptation

Jesus had fasted for forty days (and Matthew adds, forty nights – Matt. 4:2), and by the end of it was hungry. There is an analogy here to the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness. His hunger recalls the complaining of the

people in Exodus 16, when God began raining down manna. Deuteronomy 8:2 states that the Lord was behind this test. The 'son' Israel failed this test with distrust and complaining.

Satan hoped in like fashion to induce God's only-begotten Son also to fail this test, by using His divine power to turn stones into bread, rather than trusting the Father. But unlike Israel, the true Son passed the test by trusting His Father's timely provision. Thus He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 and says: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). Thus the Son pleased the Father, to Satan's disappointment.

The second temptation

Here Satan tempted Christ to jump down from the Temple. This recalls what happened at Massa (Exod. 17:1-17, and Num. 20:1-13), where the thirsty people insisted on an immediate miracle. Christ replied from Deuteronomy 6:16 (cf. Matt. 4:7 and Luke 4:12): '*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*' Jesus, unlike Israel (and Adam), was willing for God to be God. As B. Gerhardsson wrote: 'The covenant son will bow before the LORD in love, trust and obedience, regarding him not as a capricious god of fate, but as a loving Father who, while he can chastise his son with much severity, will never permanently reject him.'³⁰

Satan still seeks to deceive the Church into thinking that immediate, dramatic, outward actions, visible to all, will propel our ministry forward as opposed to the hidden life of prayer and actions 'not to be seen of men' (Matt. 6), which are the 'leaven' in the body bringing the eternal kingdom of God silently but fully.

The third temptation

Then Satan takes Jesus up to a high mountain, where he shows Him all the kingdoms of the world with their glory. He promises to give them all to Jesus if He will fall down and worship him (Matt. 4:8, 9). Jesus answered the devil in the words of Deuteronomy 6:13: 'Thou shalt fear the LoRd thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.' This takes us back to the occasion where Moses warned the Israelites not to worship the gods of the land they were entering. Satan failed, and Jesus ordered him to leave, and he had no choice but to do so (Matt. 4:10-11). Christ passed this test in total

honor toward His Father, unlike the first Adam and Israel in the wilderness and in Canaan.

The triumphant Christ won through as ‘the anointed one’ – experiencing through the three hard tests, ‘the oil of gladness’ with which the Father had anointed His human nature. What the Holy Spirit did for Him and within Him is not revealed in the sacred text, and thus we can give no valid description of it here, other than to know that He was driven into the wilderness of temptation by the Spirit, who never would have abandoned Him.

It would be interesting, but entirely speculative, to think about what some of the Psalms may have meant to Jesus during this terrible time. Since He so often quotes from the Psalms, He would have known the others. Would verses such as Psalm 31:1 have come to the mind of the Holy One: ‘In thee, O LoRd, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness’? Whether He specifically thought through this Psalm, we do not know. What we do know is that it wondrously worked out in His time of dreadful testing. At very least we know that the same Holy Spirit who was with Jesus had inspired Psalm 31, and every portion of Scripture.

After Christ won this crucial battle against Satan, He was then prepared to enter into His next three and a half years of ministry, culminating in the saving events of Gethsemane and Calvary, where He definitively put the devil to flight, and spoiled his goods. As Colossians 2:15 explains: ‘And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it [i.e. his cross].’ But he did not do so alone, for as Hebrews 9:14 says, ‘through the eternal Spirit [he] offered himself without spot to God,’ and He did so as One to whom God gave the Spirit ‘not by measure’ (John 3:34).

The Spirit gives unction to the ministry of Jesus

The Gospel of Luke shows the immediate benefit of Christ’s having successfully passed through all the temptations. Right after Luke’s account of the temptations (Luke 4:1-13), he writes: ‘And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about’ (Luke 4:14).

Luke shows Him going from one challenge to another, pushing forward His ministry in the power of the Spirit. The nature of His anointed ministry

in Galilee is then displayed in His first-reported sermon, delivered in His home-town synagogue, in Nazareth. He quotes the messianic promise of Isaiah 61, and applies it to Himself:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written [i.e. Isaiah 61:1, 2], The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the congregation were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Luke 4:16-21).

His unction showed itself in the way His words were perceived: ‘And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth’ (Luke 4:22). But they soon turned against Him because of the nature of His message, which critically compared the bad responses of Israel to those of outside Gentiles.³¹

Immediately after this angry response, from which He had to escape (Luke 4:28-30), Jesus extended His ministry to the town of Capernaum, where once again, those in the congregation in the synagogue ‘were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power’ (Luke 4:31-32). In the congregation was a man with a spirit possessed by an unclean devil (Luke 4:33). The devil immediately recognized who Jesus was, ‘the Holy One of God’, and was cast out by the Lord.

The Gospel of Mark indicates that it was the devils (‘unclean spirits’) who first recognized who Jesus was: ‘And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out: Saying, let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God’ (Mark 1:23,24). Similarly, in Mark 1:32-34, He cast out many devils. As He cast them out, they cried out: ‘Thou art the Son of God’ (Mark 3:11). However, Jesus did not let them tell the crowds who He was, as it was not the right time, and the good news had

to come through redeemed humans (Mark 3:12). When they accused Him of working by means of an unclean spirit, He warned them of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:22-29). It was the same in Matthew 12:22-30, when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub. He showed that that would have been impossible, for it would indicate that Satan was working against himself. Only God casts out demons.

It was a conflict of kingdoms: God against Satan; the Holy Spirit with-in Jesus against the hosts of the devil (Mark 3:23). The identity between Christ, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit of God is so close that They need be distinguished in these verses, and that is generally the case throughout His ministry, for it is interesting to note that there is no specific mention of the Spirit from Matt. 12:46–Matt. 22:42 or Luke 13:12–Luke 23:45 even though, all the while, Christ's active ministry is taking place. Let us take as an example Jesus's sending forth the seventy followers, to whom He gave power over devils (Luke 10:17). Through their ministry in Jesus' name, marvels happened, and when they returned to the Lord, they said, 'Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name' (Luke 10:17). Jesus replied: 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven' (Luke 10:18). It is therefore, through the name of Jesus, as uttered by His servants, that the powers of evil are being defeated. Since Jesus was not in most cases physically present with these emissaries, we can conclude that He sent the Holy Spirit with them to empower them to overcome evil spiritual forces. The One who had the unction of the Spirit had authority to share that anointing with others of His choosing. One aspect of Christ's granting unction was through praying for His disciples, as He did for Simon Peter to triumph through the attacks to come from Satan (cf. Luke 22:31-32). That is how His ministry worked throughout, which ended up with 'Satan as lightning falling from heaven'.

Luke 10:21 says that Jesus rejoiced in Spirit, as He prayed, right after the victorious ministry of the seventy: 'In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father ...' One assumes that this refers primarily to His own spirit, but not disconnected from the Holy Spirit, in whose presence He lived. While Isaiah 53 (frequently quoted in the New Testament, where it is applied to Jesus) speaks of His horrendous sorrows, still He faced the extreme end of these sorrows with joy: 'who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross' (Heb. 12:2).

Peter summarizes the power of the unction of the Holy Spirit upon the ministry of Jesus in Acts 10:38: 'How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.'

The Spirit in Jesus' Death

Throughout the agonies of the death of Christ, Hebrews 9:14 says that 'through the eternal Spirit [he] offered himself without spot to God ...' The Spirit is not elsewhere specifically named in the sufferings and death of Christ, but in His voluntarily chosen extreme weakness, He manifested a supreme power to overcome the devil and the last enemy. As the eternal Son of God, He was 'the strength of Israel', but in His human nature, He was 'through the eternal Spirit [offering] himself without spot to God.'

That is why Staniloae wrote:

In the East the acceptance of death before God is understood as strength. That is why the death Jesus suffered is at the same time an occasion for manifesting the power through which death is conquered by the Son of God in the body and with the collaboration of the strengthened body. For the body too can be strong in bearing sufferings through the power given to it by the Son of God on behalf of the divine nature. Thus there is no contradiction between the power given to the human nature in performing healings and the power of endurance. It is in the power of enduring sufferings that the body becomes interiorly capable of being an instrument and of his Resurrection as the last step in this direction. Therefore, by accepting this humbling of the body, the Word of God simultaneously strengthens it.³²

This is to say that while it took massive strength for Jesus to lead a totally holy life, it also took massive strength for Him to die the death He chose to undergo in our place. Only His infinite Godness could have enabled Him to go through such horrors that we can scarcely begin to imagine. What He endured for us in His death required as much miraculous power as any and all of the miracles of His earthly ministry.

The Son of God and Word of God in union with the humanity of Christ, are anointed with 'the eternal Spirit' for this salvific work for all His people.³³ It may be that Hebrews 5:7 involves a fresh unction of the Holy

Spirit, when the Father ‘*heard* his Son’s cries’: ‘Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.’

K. Schilder seems to be right here: ‘In Gethsemane no one touched him except God alone. Hence in Gethsemane his own soul sacrificed itself to God In shedding His blood in Gethsemane [i.e. “sweating great drops of blood”] He is *offering His soul*. In Gethsemane He offered His soul a sacrifice. And on Golgotha He sacrificed His body Gethsemane, where the soul offered itself before the body, and Golgotha, where the body offered itself after the soul, are *united* by the invisible work of the Spirit. By the eternal Spirit Christ offered himself to God blameless.’³⁴ In similar fashion, James H. Thornwell of nineteenth-century South Carolina, beautifully expressed the worship within the Godhead involved in this infinite sacrifice.³⁵

The same Spirit who was in the prophets, who predicted the sufferings of Christ, was certainly in the actual sufferings when they at length were being fulfilled. ‘Of which salvation, the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory what should follow’ (1 Pet. 1:10-11).

Between Christ’s death and resurrection, John Calvin, along with much of the Christian Tradition, East and West, suggests the presence of the Spirit with His body, so that even in the grave, His body saw no corruption: ‘The life of Christ will be exempted from the dominion of the grave, inasmuch as his body, even when dead, will not be subject to corruption. Besides, we know that the grave of Christ was filled, and as it were embalmed with the life-giving perfume of the Spirit, that it might be to him the gate to immortal glory.’³⁶

The Spirit in Jesus’ Resurrection

Romans 8:11 states that the Spirit was an agent of the resurrection of the body of Christ: ‘But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by the Spirit that dwelleth in you.’ Romans 1:4 says that it

was ‘according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.’ Paul states that in ‘the great mystery of godliness’, Christ was ‘justified in the Spirit’ (1 Tim. 3:16), And Peter writes ‘... being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit’ (1 Pet. 3:18).

In John 10:18, Christ says that He will raise up His own body (see also John 2:19-21), but generally in the New Testament, the Father is said to be the agent of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:32; 17:31; 1 Cor. 15:15). Romans 6:4 states that ‘he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father’.³⁷

The risen Christ possessed a *spiritual* body. It was different from the body of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead after four days. When Lazarus was let out of the tomb, Jesus told the people to loosen him from his grave clothes, which still bound him. This means that while he now had once again a living body, it was still a *physical* body; subject to the earthly conditions of space and time. But the body of the risen Lord was transformed into a spiritual body, not subject to the laws of space and time, as His physical body had been. The various resurrection accounts in the Gospels show Him passing through closed doors and stone walls. He could be unrecognizable or make Himself known. Apparently, He could move as quickly as thought, from one place to the other. At the chosen time, He was taken up in a cloud of glory through the air, back to the Father’s throne above in His ascension.

Yet at the same time, His spiritual body was real; it was substantial enough to be touched by doubting Thomas; Mary could recognize His voice, and He could prepare breakfast by the seaside for the disciples. His body therefore had been transformed in the Spirit, so that it could express both physical properties, at His choice, but generally function as a transcendent being, not limited by the laws of physics as we know them.

It is in His role as ‘the Last Adam’ that Christ was made ‘a quickening spirit’ (1 Cor. 15:45). The first Adam was ‘a living soul’, and so from him passed down physical life to all his descendants, but from the Last Adam, spiritual life is conveyed to all who identify with Him by faith. He is the source of all spiritual life to all His people. We might say that this life begins with ‘resurrection of the spirit’ of the believer and will conclude with the resurrection of their body. Like that of their Saviour, their body will become ‘spiritual’ or ‘glorified’.

We are not able to say very much about this body, but it is very important, as the head of a resurrection humanity. Paul describes its

significance in 1 Corinthians 15:20-26:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

To say that the risen Lord became 'life-giving spirit' posits such a close, *perichoretic* identity between Christ and the Holy Spirit, that from the risen Lord, the new life of the eternal Spirit is emitted, as in John 20:22, where on the evening of Resurrection Day, the risen Jesus breathed on His disciples, and said unto them, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' This is also brought out in the somewhat complex verses in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: 'Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

Following the exegesis of Geerhardus Vos, I take it that 'the Lord is that Spirit' means that the risen Christ is 'the Lord of the Spirit': 'In *apo kuriou pneumatos* the preposition governs *kuriou* and *pneumatos* is Genit. Qualitatis. It means "from the Lord of the Spirit" not "from the Spirit of the Lord".'³⁸

This shows a major development from the teaching of Hebrews 1:9 (where the incarnate Christ was 'anointed with the oil of gladness'), and 2 Corinthians 3:17, where Christ is 'the Lord of the Spirit'. In His active obedience (His holy life that totally kept the law), and in His passive obedience (vicariously suffering on the cross to pay the full penalty for our breaking of the law), in His bodily resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit was so identified with the Lord Jesus Christ, that the Spirit Himself was, as it were, thoroughly fitted to bring Christ into His people that He bears the shape of Jesus. While Son and Spirit are eternally co-equal, and always distinct from one another, still Paul says that the Spirit has so interpenetrated all that Christ was and did, that He himself now is in the

very likeness of Christ, who in that sense is His Lord. Being in that sense in the shape of Jesus, the Spirit is able to convey the salvific presence of Jesus.

To quote Staniloae,

The descent of the Holy Spirit is thus the act of transition from Christ's saving work in His personal humanity to the extension of this work within other human beings. Through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, Christ lays the foundation of the Church in His body, and through these events, the Church's being exists in its potential form. However, the Son of God became man not for Himself but so that He could extend salvation from His body, as divine life within us. This divine life, extended from His body into those who believe, is the Church. This life shines forth from His body, which was raised up to the full state of pneumatization (spiritualization) through His Ascension and sitting at the right hand of the Father, within the deepest intimacy of infinite life and love that God directs toward human beings.³⁹

When the Holy Spirit comes, Christ Himself comes, as we see so often in chapters 14 and 16 of John. For example, Jesus promises in John 14:18: 'I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.' (The immediate context shows that 'comfort' refers to the Holy Spirit, and that when He comes, Christ comes). Chapter 16 shows that although Christ must leave them for His heavenly home, the Comforter will come (v. 7), and He will take the things of Christ, and show them to the disciples, so that they will know the present blessings of Christ Himself (vv. 8-16).

William Milligan of Aberdeen cogently argued that the Holy Spirit did not come down in all His personal power and glory until Pentecost, because human nature had to be adapted through the humanity of Christ to be able to bear Him, without being destroyed by His holy presence. To have come in such power before Christ had completed His work would have 'short-circuited' our humanity.

I would suggest that, from 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, the blessed Holy Spirit himself had to be fully adapted to dwell in holy power within human beings, by way of being shaped through His presence and working within the incarnate Christ. Hebrews 5:8 and 9 teach that the eternally perfect Christ (as to His Godhead) still had to be shaped into human obedience, to fit Him to be our Lord and Savior: 'Though he were a Son, yet learned he

obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him ...’

Holy Scripture does not speak of the Holy Spirit ‘learning obedience’, for that was the function of the Last Adam. But I believe it is not going too far to say that as He accompanied and empowered the incarnate Christ, He too – in an ineffable way – was adapted to indwell the humans who would be united to Christ in the Church. That is, the Holy Spirit was not unaffected by the developments undergone by Christ in His earthly life, death, and resurrection. Thereby, He was fitted to be ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27). This prepares us to consider the great gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God on the Day of Pentecost.

1. T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 69.

2. While the Spirit does not have His own image, He is a distinct person within the Trinity, eternally co-existing and co-equal to Father and Son.

3. Torrance, *op. cit.*, pp. 211, 212.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

5. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Volume 4, The Church Communion in the Holy Spirit*, Translated and edited by Ioan Ionita (Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, Massachusetts, 2012), pp. 6, 7.

6. Staniloae, *op. cit.*, pp. 100, 101.

7. ‘The effect of the doctrine of the Spirit on the doctrine of the Father and the Son may be discerned in the statement of Athanasius that while Christ is the only *eidos* or “Image” of the Godhead, the Spirit is the *eidos* or image of the Son [See *Con. Ar.* 3.6,10; *Ad Ser.* 1, p. 19f.; cf. Didymus, *De Trin.* 2, pp. 5, 11, and John of Damascus, *De fid.* 1, p. 13]. The idea that the Spirit is the “image” of the Son may be rather puzzling until it is realized that the Spirit himself is *imageless*. This implies that since the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same nature [Cf. Cyril of Jer., *Cat.*, 16.3: “The one Father, the one Son, and the one Spirit belong essentially and inseparably together”]. It must be in an *ineffable, imageless* and wholly *spiritual* way that we are to think of them and of their relations with one another in the Holy Trinity’ (T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, p. 194).

8. SEE DOUGLAS F. KELLY, *Systematic Theology, Volume One: Grounded in Holy Scripture and understood in the light of the Church* (CHRISTIAN FOCUS PUBLICATIONS: GEANIES HOUSE, FEARN, ROSS-shire, 2008), pp. 453-55; 489-93, etc.

9. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, I. Chapter XII (p. 31).

10. I have sought to deal with the details of this prophecy and of the Virgin Birth itself elsewhere; see Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume I*, pp.300-10.

11. I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke: New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), p. 70.

12. Ibid., p. 67.
13. William Hendricksen, *Matthew* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1973), p. 72.
14. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, II. Chapter 14 (p. 49).
15. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, pp. 198, 199.
16. John Calvin, *Institutes*, II. XIII. 4 (p. 481 in Battles' translation).
17. Pierre Courthial, *Le Jour des Petits Recommencements: Essai sur l'Actualité de la Parole (Évangile-Loi) de Dieu* (L'Âge d'Homme: Messages: Lausanne, 1996), p. 62 (my translation).
18. Courthial, op. cit., p. 56.
19. I. Howard Marshall, op. cit., p. 152.
20. Ibid., p. 153.
21. The Adoptionists were a sect deemed heretical by the early Church. They denied the eternal sonship of Christ and held that He was during His earthly life 'adopted' by God the Father, possibly at His birth or at His resurrection.
22. Augustine was reading the *Life of Antony* in the garden where he began the movements of his later conversion.
23. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, X, p. 2.
24. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, p. 31.
25. There is a fascinating section in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* known as the Grand Inquisitor. In it, Alyosha's atheistic academic brother Ivan tells a tale where Christ returns to earth in Seville at the time of the Inquisition. After performing miracles, Jesus is arrested by the leaders and sentenced to be burnt at the stake. Then – and here is the parallel – the Grand Inquisitor comes to him in his cell and shows him how his methods have and will ultimately fail in securing the kingdom. The methods of the flesh are more powerful and exigent. And he seeks to demonstrate this through a retelling of the three temptations. Dostoyevsky reinforces with profound psychological and spiritual insight how the devil tempts modern man to reject the humble way of Christ and how his human systems of religion actively combat against the true working of the Spirit in bringing New Creation (Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Brothers Karamazov*. Translated by Andrew R. MacAndrew. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. See Book V, Chapter 5: The Grand Inquisitor, pp. 297-319).
26. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, p. 31.
27. John Knox, *Select Practical Writings*. Edited by Thomas Thomson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), pp. 183-84.
28. J. Dupont, *Les Tentationes de Jésus au Désert*, in *Studia Neotestamentica* 4 (Desclée de Brouwer: Bruges, 1968), p. 22.
29. See D. F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two*, pp. 325-28.
30. Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son (Matthew 4:1-11): An Analysis of an Early Christian Midrash* (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon, reprint of 1966 edition), p. 31.
31. cf. 'The Grand Inquisitor' in Dostoevsky, op. cit.
32. Staniloae, op. cit., p. 110.
33. John Owen expounds this offering of Christ through the eternal Spirit with lucidity: 'This is the second thing wherein the apostle opposeth the offering of Christ unto the offerings of the priests under the law:
(1) They offered *bulls and goats*; he offered *himself*.
(2) They offered by a *material altar and fire*; he offered by the *eternal Spirit*.
'That Christ should thus offer himself unto God, and that by the eternal Spirit is the centre of the mystery of the gospel The depth of this mystery we cannot dive into, the height we cannot

comprehend In the consideration of the divine settings of the eternal Spirit of Christ in the offering of himself, of the holy exercise of all grace in the human nature that was offered, of the nature, dignity, and efficacy of this sacrifice, faith finds life, food, and refreshment.’ In *Hebrews Volume 6: Exposition of Chapters 8:1–10:39, The Works of John Owen, Volume XXII* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1991), p. 307.

34. K. Schilder, *Christ in His Suffering*, pp. 370-71.

35. In his *Collected Writings, Volume 2, Theological and Ethical, 179-181*, Thornwell says: ‘... although the fire which consumed the victim was the curse in its whole extent, yet it was an act of worship to provide it, and especially as that victim was Himself, every groan and pang, every exclamation of agony, amazement and sorrow, was a homage to God, which, in itself considered, the Priest felt it glorious to render His Father was never dearer, never more truly God in His sight, than when He accepted the sacrifice of Himself, the sublimity of the principles involved, and the interest of Jesus in them, are a perfect vindication from every illiberal suspicion Our world becomes the outer court of the sanctuary, where a sacrifice is to be offered in which the Priest and the Victim are alike the wonder of the universe ... in which the worship which is rendered leaves it doubtful whether the Deity is more glorious in His justice or in His grace.’

36. John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Book of Psalms* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), p. 232.

37. The threefold agents of the resurrection of the Lord are an illustration of the ancient Trinitarian doctrine of *perichoresis* (i.e. mutual indwelling of the three divine persons within one another, so that where one is, the others are, and what one is doing, the others are doing). As Saint HILARY WROTE (IN THE FOURTH CENTURY): ‘THEY [I.E. THE THREE DIVINE PERSONS] RECIPROCALLY CONTAIN ONE another so that one should permanently envelope, and also be permanently enveloped by the OTHER, WHOM HE YET ENVELOPES,’ IN *De Trinitate*, III. 1.

38. Geerhardus Vos, ‘Paul’s Eschatological Concept of the Spirit’, in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.: Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1980), p. 114.

39. Staniloae, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

CHAPTER 3

RECEPTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY THE CHURCH AT PENTECOST

The New Covenant is marked by a more direct and immediate relationship to God of His people. On Sinai, the holy Law was written on stones, and at Pentecost it is written in the very hearts of His people. Pentecost marks the beginning of the life of God interpenetrating, not only Israel, but all nations. Tongues of the various nations were supernaturally spoken on that day, and through the Spirit the Word, the second Person of the Trinity, opens up the very substance of God, so that the elect of all nations now live in terms of it.

Reception of the Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

The miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the young church on the day of Pentecost marks the full entrance of God's people into the New Covenant, promised through Jeremiah 31:33-34:

But this shall be the covenant that I make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LoRd, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour ... saying, Know the LoRd: for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the LoRd: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This New Covenant is marked by a more direct and immediate relationship to God, with a powerfully rooted internal sense in the believer of who God is and what He wants. While the inspired doctrine of the appointed teachers of the Old Testament is never set aside, this phase of the Covenant involves experiencing a more keen inwardness of God's saving presence. Crucial aspects of it will be described in Romans 8:15, 16, as follows: 'Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God' (see

also Galatians 4:5, 6). Part of the joy of such direct knowledge of God is that we now instinctively apprehend that He is our heavenly Father, and that our sins are forever forgiven through His incarnate Son, whose Spirit we have received in faith.

Like Calvary and the empty tomb, Pentecost is a major turning point in the broadening history of redemption. After it, we are living in the last days, just as Hebrews 1:2 already speaks of ‘these last days, spoken unto us by his Son’ Part of His speaking is the coming down of the Spirit in a new way, that will profoundly mark His people to the end of time. In his Pentecostal sermon, Peter says that lying behind these events is the exaltation of Christ: ‘Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.’ The young Church is now equipped to fulfill her worldwide mission, given her by the risen Lord: ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen’ (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Gerrit Dawson discusses helpfully the relationship of the Holy Spirit with believers, after Christ has ascended, so that He makes present to us the risen Christ:

The energy and vigour of the ascended Jesus are poured into us by the conveying work of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. Calvin avoids any idea of the literal body of Christ being in the elements of bread and wine. But from the literal body of Christ in heaven there comes to us by means of the Spirit the life-giving virtues of his flesh He spiritually gives to us from his physical, glorified body!¹

Also Staniloae writes:

However, the Son of God became man not for himself, but so that he could extend salvation from his body, as divine life within us. This divine life, extended from his body into those who believe, is the Church. This life shines forth from his body, which was raised up to the full state of pneumatization (spiritualization) through his ascension and sitting at the

right hand of the Father, within the deepest intimacy of infinite life and love that God directs towards human beings ...²

The Church, which existed potentially in Christ's body, truly came to life through the Holy Spirit's shining forth from Christ's body into human beings. This shining forth began at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and made them the first members of the Church, the first faithful in whom the power of Christ's pneumatized body is extended. Without the Church, Christ's saving work could not be accomplished...³

The presence of this risen Lord is now filling and empowering His church to the end of the age, in a manner never seen before, to win the nations. And this divine presence is in the Holy Spirit who has been poured out upon God's people, never to depart. Jesus said in John 16:7: 'Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.' Therefore the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah (see also Hebrews chapters 8 and 10) is not limited to Israel; it is for 'all flesh' throughout the world. The elect of every nation will also come to know the direct presence of God, with its inward sense of the divine favour, spoken of by Paul in Romans 5:5: 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.'

Augustine shows how this coming down of Him who is love makes the people of God share in the divine love at Pentecost: 'The Holy Spirit also, whether we are to call him that absolute love which joins together Father and Son, and joins us also from beneath, that so it is not unfitly said which is written, "God is love"'⁴

Pentecost hastens the grand harvest of the ingathering of countless multitudes of men and women into the Church. The very time of Pentecost, in terms of the three yearly festivals of the Hebrew religious calendar,⁵ shows that it is all about the future harvest. Those festivals were Passover (associated with the very early harvest and connected to the exodus from Egypt) and Tabernacles or Trumpets (associated with the ingathering of the vintage much later in the agricultural year, and connected to the journey through the wilderness, and then the rest in the Promised Land). Between the two was situated Pentecost, which was at the time of the completion of the cereal harvest, or 'first fruits':

[Pentecost] was celebrated at the end of seven weeks (or a week of weeks) from the second day of Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread, i.e. the sixteenth day of the month Nisan (Lev. 23:15, 16). Hence it was called the Feast of Weeks (Exod. 34:22. Deut. 16:10). From the Greek-speaking Jews of later times, it received the equivalent name of *Pentecost* or *Fiftieth*, i.e. the feast of the fiftieth day after the sixteenth of Nisan Pentecost occurred at the completion of the harvest or cereal ingathering, and was sometimes called *the feast of harvest* (Exod. 23:16), and *the day of the first fruits* (Num.28:26), because its distinctive rite was the oblation of two loaves as a sample and acknowledgement of the harvest (Lev. 23:17).⁶

The description by the Apostle James of the members of the New Testament Church as ‘first fruits’ is in line with the harvest theme of Pentecost. He writes: ‘Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures’ (Jas. 1:18). And the harvest of ‘about three thousand souls’ (Acts 2:41) at Pentecost was the beginning of the spread of salvation to all the world.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christ Himself penetrates into human hearts, because His body was made spiritual in an incomparable way through the Spirit, who thoroughly indwelt and thus penetrated Christ’s body. John Chrysostom wrote: ‘As Christ said about himself, “And Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” and that is why we can always celebrate Epiphany, so he said about the Spirit, “He dwells with you and will be in you,” and that is why we can always celebrate Pentecost.’⁷

Passover was connected to the Exodus; Ingathering to the later cereal harvest, and – if Joseph Addison Alexander is right – Pentecost had a certain connection to the giving of the law on Sinai. ‘Jewish tradition has filled the chasm [i.e. it is not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament], as we learn from the Talmud and Maimonides by affirming that the Pentecost, or fiftieth day after the sixteenth of Nisan, was the very day on which the law was given from Mount Sinai.’⁸

If that be true, then there is a vivid contrast between Sinai and Pentecost. On Sinai, the holy law was written on tables of stone, but on Pentecost, the same holy law was written on the fleshly table of the heart, as Jeremiah foretold, and Paul expounded in 2 Corinthians 3:3: ‘Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in

fleshly tables of the heart.’ In the earlier chapter, Paul expressed this inward ‘writing’ of deepest desire to do the holy will of God in terms of ‘anointing’, ‘sealing’ and ‘earnest of the Spirit’: ‘Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts’ (2 Cor. 1:21-22). It is this inward longing to be holy in every direction that is such a glorious advancement created by the Spirit’s work in the New Covenant. In a sense, it fulfills in massively fuller degree the divine/human dialogue of Psalm 27:8: ‘When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LoRd, will I seek.’

Some golden words of Samuel Rutherford (a Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s) show the happy place, where the coming down of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant at Pentecost leads us. He writes: ‘Christ has come and run away to heaven with my heart and love, so that neither heart nor love is mine.’⁹ Yet Rutherford was no stranger to suffering, for many of the rich thoughts expressed in his spiritual letters – called by C. H. Spurgeon, the ‘nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men’ – were forged in the crucible of suffering and loss.

A hymn beautifully traces the mercies we experience on earth and in heaven to the Holy Spirit:

O Holy Ghost, the Lord and the Life-giver,
Thine is the quickening power that gives increase;
From thee have flowed, as from a pleasant river,
Our plenty, wealth, prosperity, and peace.¹⁰

The events of the Day of Pentecost

The participants

The eleven disciples had been together to witness the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:4). At that time, the Lord told them: ‘But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.’ They soon returned to Jerusalem, and in an upper room joined in prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and the brethren of Jesus (Acts 1:14). Peter preached concerning Judas, and then Matthias was appointed to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-26). In

this second, and larger meeting in the upper room, 120 were gathered together.

But overall, the participants at Pentecost were Jews, who had come from all over the known world to celebrate the Festival of First-Fruits, and perhaps some of them now lived there (Acts 2:5). Most of them would have known Aramaic, possibly Hebrew, and likely Greek. But they were amazed when, after the gift of tongues (languages), they heard people speaking in the languages of the territories where they now lived. That is what the gift of tongues (languages) accomplished. Acts 2:9 mentions ‘Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia ...’ J. A. Alexander says that ‘The names are neither chosen nor arranged at random, but follow each other in a certain geographical order, beginning at the north-east, and then proceeding to the west and the south The first three denote races adjacent to the Caspian Sea, and all belonging to the ancient Persian empire....From these north-eastern tracts he passes to Mesopotamia ... and [from there] he passes over to the peninsula of Asia Minor, [and then mentions Judea] which lay between Mesopotamia and Asia Minor.’¹¹

Acts 2:10 lists ‘Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes.’ Verse 11 adds: ‘Cretes and Arabians ...’ According to Alexander, ‘The names here added do not violate the order previously followed, but complete the circle, as it were, by passing from the extreme west (Italy) to the extreme south (Arabia), between which two extremes the important island Crete ... lies in a direct line.’¹²

What we see here is that the people involved in the blessings of Pentecost came from all portions of the Mediterranean world, which had tribes who spoke all of the many languages in which, miraculously, through the gift of tongues, the wonderful works of God will be expressed. This list of nations is reminiscent of the table of nations in Genesis 10:1-32, just before the confusion of tongues at Babel. Babel was a divine judgment, and Pentecost constitutes a reversal of that judgment, so that now in all languages, what God has done in Christ can be preached and understood.¹³ Linguistic division can, after Pentecost, be overcome in terms of the preaching of the Gospel.

Pierre Courthial notes that this is the beginning of the nations coming into the Covenant that had been reserved to Israel:

It is significant that the Feast of Tabernacles...was also the Harvest Festival (Exodus 23:16), which announced the conversion of the nations to the true faith. Although neglected for a long time, it was taken back up after the return from exile in Babylon, and found its true sense in the preaching of the later prophets. Thus, in the last day of the Feast, Haggai announced: '... I will shake the heavens and the earth And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory; saith the LORD of hosts' (Haggai 2:6,7). And Zechariah: 'And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles' (Zechariah 14:16).

In the description which the Law gives of what should be during the Feast of Tabernacles or of the Harvest (Numbers 29:12-38), the Torah ordains the sacrifice of seventy bulls, as a memorial of the seventy nations descended from Noah, and as a promise of the drawing of the seventy nations into the Kingdom of God.¹⁴

One assumes that, it was after the return, that the Feast of the Tabernacles was developed in the preaching of later prophets, such as Haggai and Zechariah above.

In John 7, we read: 'In the last day, that great day of the Feast (i.e. of Tabernacles), Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified') (vv. 37-39).

The Jewish background to this Feast saw water in a golden vessel ceremonially carried in procession from the Pool of Siloam to the Temple. Then the water was poured out in front of the altar of burnt offerings, and Isaiah 12:3 was recited: 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.' Trumpets would be sounded, special Psalms were sung, and the people gave thanks for the rain. It reminded the people of the rain God had sent in the time of Moses (Exod. 17:1-6). It also looked forward to the days when abundant, living water would flow from the Temple in the messianic kingdom. Many scholars believe that Jesus made His prediction about the living water as this ceremonial water was being poured out in front of the altar (cf. John 7:37-39). For example, as J. C. Ryle suggests:

It is probable, as almost all commentators remark, that our Lord chose this figure and imagery because of the Jewish custom of drawing water from the pool of Siloam during the feast of tabernacles and carrying it in solemn procession to the temple. And it is thought that our Lord purposely refers to this ceremony of which the minds of many would doubtless be full. 'Does anyone want true water of life, better than any water of Siloam? Let him come to Me and by faith draw out of Me living waters, even peace of conscience and pardon of sins.' But it is fair to remember that this is only conjecture. This custom of drawing water from Siloam at the feast was a human invention, nowhere commanded in the law of Moses or even mentioned in the Old Testament; and it admits of doubt whether our Lord would have sanctioned it. Moreover, it is evident from John iv.10 and vi.35 that the figures of 'water' and 'thirst' were not infrequently used by our Lord. The figures, at any rate, were familiar to all Jews, from Isaiah lv.1.¹⁵

This life-giving, free-flowing water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, which believers would receive after Jesus had completed His earthly mission and had been glorified. It may well be that this feast recalled the sojourn of the Jews in the wilderness, when water was miraculously given from the rock. Paul says that this rock followed them, as a sort of type: namely, Christ, the true rock (1 Cor. 10:4). The ascended Jesus at Pentecost would pour out this living water into His people.

Water and rivers, oil, wind and fire, can all stand for the presence and working of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 we find both wind and fire.

The Gift of Tongues in Wind and Fire

Acts 2:2 describes the sound from heaven of 'a mighty rushing wind' that filled all the house. 'Wind' (in the original 'blast' or 'gust') is appropriate to exhibit the down coming of the Holy Spirit, for as we saw earlier, 'breath' and 'wind' refer in the Genesis accounts of creation to the working of the Spirit of God (e.g., Gen. 1:2, etc.). There may be a certain connection here (at least in word usage), to the teaching of Jesus on the new birth, comparing its mysterious nature to the blowing of the wind: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.'

Immediately after the mighty wind, tongues of fire sat on the heads of the assembled people (Acts 2:3). These people included the apostles, and other devout Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival. The Authorized Version's rendering of 'cloven tongues of fire' means, by a literal translation, 'distributed', that is, the heavenly fire was placed (or 'distributed') on absolutely everyone's head. We do not know exactly what the fire looked like, but we do know that there are strong Old Testament connections of fire with God's presence, such as in the burning bush seen by Moses, that was not consumed; the fiery, cloudy pillar that was over the tabernacle; the fire that fell on the water-soaked animal offerings of Elijah, and so forth.

With the fire on the heads, the tongues were loosened to speak in languages unknown to the speakers. Thus, people from countries between Italy in the west to Arabia, all heard the Gospel being proclaimed in the languages which they heard in their home countries. It was a high-order miracle. Interpreters were not needed; everyone understood in their own familiar language. The God of creation and redemption was doing it – nothing hard for One so great as He! The One whose Son is 'the Word' is able to give expression to words in any tongue He chooses. And that is what He did on the day of Pentecost.

In Mark 16:17, the pre-ascended Christ promised that because of His gift, His disciples would speak in 'new tongues', which seems to mean 'new' to them. The bearers of the Gospel are now ready to take the saving truth out to all nations, and so to fulfill Christ's Great Commission of Matthew 28. The general public heard about this linguistic miracle and were amazed (Acts 2:6-8). What they were hearing in their own languages were 'the wonderful works of God.' Some, who wanted a merely physical explanation of the miracle that made them very uneasy ('confounded,' Acts 2:6), claimed that the disciples were speaking under the influence of 'new wine', or 'sweet wine'; an intoxicating drink (Acts 2:13). But Peter answered them directly, that such could not be the case, for 'it is but the third hour of the day'. In the Roman computation, followed at this period in Judea, that would have been between eight and nine in the morning. As Paul said elsewhere, 'for they that be drunken are drunken in the night' (1 Thess. 5:7). Even among dissolute drinkers, it was not the custom to be intoxicated at such an early hour.

Then Peter gives a true explanation, one that should have impinged on the general Jewish consciousness; and to do so, he directly quotes from the Prophet Joel:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LoRd come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LoRd shall be delivered ...' (Joel 2:28-32).

This means that the miracle of Pentecost was a direct fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. As J. A. Alexander remarks, 'This is not intoxication, it is inspiration ...'¹⁶

'Prophecy' included truth that came from God, often by means of dreams and visions. It was not merely for their relatives, but for their servants as well, and indeed for all flesh who would 'call on the name of the LoRd' (Joel 2:32). To prophesy can mean not only to foretell the future but also to explicate the truths of God's Word. That is part of the significance of its being miraculously spoken in all languages; it was for all people. This represents a very major advancement over the normal restriction to Israel of God's truth and salvation. Since Jesus has come, ascended, and poured out His Spirit, this outpouring is made available to all the world, of every territory, race, class, and tongue. The unction placed upon the Messiah of Israel, is now placed upon all His people of every sort and condition.

Contrast between the Quran and Pentecost: Pentecost shows that there is no one language of revelation

Professor Lamin Sanneh (of Yale University) points out the salient difference between Islam and Christianity on the matter of translated languages. He mentions that Islam holds to a Quran that they believe was delivered to earth from heaven in exact Arabic, that cannot be changed. 'The many translations of the Quran lack canonical authority for that reason. Muslims may use the translations for private study, but not for the

stipulated acts of public worship, and certainly not a substitute for the original.’¹⁷ This is in utter contrast to the Day of Pentecost where the mighty acts of God were not in any one privileged or revealed language: it was in the languages of ‘the seventy nations’, as it were (to quote Courthial).

So Professor Sanneh writes about the high significance of there not being only one language of revelation concerning Christ: ‘Being the original Scripture of the Christian movement, the New Testament Gospels are a translated version of the message of Jesus, and that means that Christianity is a translated religion without a revealed language. The issue is not whether Christians translated their Scripture well or willingly, but that without translation there would be no Christianity or Christians.’¹⁸ We must note that Pentecost, by its very nature, richly prepared the way for this fruitful outreach to all nations and all languages.

As Sanneh notes: ‘Without a counterpart to the revealed Quran of Muslims, Christians transmitted their Scripture in the languages of other people, indicating thereby that these languages have a priority in the Christian scheme. This is more than just a tactical concession to win converts. It is, rather, an acknowledgment that languages have intrinsic merit for communication of the divine message. They are worthy of God’s attention.’¹⁹

Cosmic Changes

The cosmic changes that Joel declares will accompany the outpouring of the Messianic Spirit, should be interpreted in light of the manner in which such cosmic events are mentioned in several Old Testament passages, which employ similar terms. Several Old Testament passages use stars and heavenly signs to represent various people or tribes. At times, the people of Israel are analogous to stars (Gen. 22:10-17; Deut. 1:10, 10:22 etc.). When nations fall, Old Testament writers speak (in terms of the Jewish nation) of sun and moon being darkened (Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7,8). The darkening of heavenly lights shows the darkness that will descend when Judaism falls.

This is shown in Joseph’s dream (which caused his brothers to hate him). He saw the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. His father and brothers immediately understood this to mean that the eleven of them, along with Jacob, would bow down to Joseph, and it infuriated them (Gen. 37:9-11). Stars often stood for kings and governors (see Judg. 5:19-

20). Sun, moon, and stars symbolically represented rulers and nations, and their downfall is displayed through cosmic imagery, which shows that God is behind all such changes. For instance, the downfall of Babylon is foretold in Isaiah 13:9-10: 'Behold, the day of the LoRd cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate, and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.' Similar analogies can be found in Isaiah 34:1-5, speaking of Edom, and Amos 5:18 of Israel.

Joel's prophecy about the dimming of heavenly lights that represent great nations would be more fully carried out when Judaism was devastated by Rome in a.d. 70 (see Matt. 24:29-34, where Christ predicts the downfall of unbelieving Judaism in such terms). But Peter does not apply this coming judgment against the Jews in his Pentecostal sermon. Instead, he gives a gracious call to repentance.

Peter's Pentecostal Sermon

The last verse from the quotation above, taken from Joel, says that 'whosoever shall call upon the name of the LoRd shall be saved.' Peter, at the head of this sermon, shows which Lord this is: it is the Messiah of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, who did 'miracles, wonders, and signs among you' (Acts 2:22). The 'miracles' (or mighty works) are attested by 'wonders and signs'. 'Wonder' (*teras*) appears sixteen times in the New Testament, mostly in Luke/Acts, and 'signs' (*semeion*) appears seventy-seven times, again in Luke and Acts. The terms include things that surprise those who see them, things unexpected, that show God's power at work on earth. 'The parallel terms (e.g. 'signs') refer to God's miraculous work in the creation. It has OT roots in the exodus story of Moses (Exod. 4:8-9; etc....). Johnson connects it to a second Moses motif ...'²⁰

We remember that Nicodemus had said: 'no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him' (John 3:2). Thus, Peter states: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.'

Peter then immediately expounds the heart of the Gospel: 'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain' (Acts 2:23). Two

absolutely remarkable truths are held together here, a combination of facts that surpasses all human understanding. First, Christ was delivered up by the eternal plan of God (see also Acts 4:28: ‘For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done’). The crucifixion was vaguely adumbrated in the first promise of the gospel in Genesis 3:15, where the serpent would bruise the heel of Eve’s descendant, who would also crush his head. This had been planned from all eternity, as Revelation 13:8 indicates: ‘... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’ Jesus moved inexorably forward in His earthly ministry with this goal in mind: ‘But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?’ (Luke 12:50).

But secondly, at the very same time, God judges as ‘*wicked*’ the human hands that crucified and slew His Son (Acts 2:23b). In no sense were the Romans and Jewish leaders of that period forced, or even tempted by God, to kill Christ. They did it of their own selfish will, leaving them totally and eternally guilty of the crime of all crimes. The evil one was also, of course, pushing them with his hatred against the Son of God (as when Satan entered into Judas – Luke 22:3). Therefore, Peter earnestly calls on them to repent before it is too late (cf. Acts 2:40). The guilty sinners who had participated in the slaying of Christ would repent only in the context of the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 39). Peter does not expound in this sermon the atonement of Christ, but he includes it in Christ’s being ‘delivered up’, ‘being slain’ (v. 22), and ‘crucified’. And then, in the latter part of this sermon, he clearly relates the ascension of the risen Christ to the sending down of the Holy Spirit on that day of Pentecost (Acts 2:33).

Peter here emphasizes the bodily resurrection of Jesus as the proof of the victory of His total holiness. He explains why ‘it was not possible that he should be holden [of the pains of death]’ – Acts 2:24, in terms of a quotation from Psalm 16 by David:

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance (Acts 2:25-28, taken from Psalm 16:9-11).

The One who was eminently holy could not be held by the fetters of death, which bind those who are personal sinners. While as our substitute, He took on our sins (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), He never became a sinner; He remained personally pure and innocent. As Professor James S. Stewart used to say in his classes in Edinburgh, ‘Death took on too much when it took on Jesus of Nazareth!’ The totally sinless One could not be held by death, because it is ‘the wages of sin’. The holy Son of God vanquished it from within its foul precincts. Hence, Peter proclaims great gladness following the atoning death of Christ (Acts 2:28). Peter goes on to show that the primary reference of Psalm 16 is Christ, not David, for it was Christ, not David, who ascended into the heavens (Acts 2:34).

From that glorious throne in heaven, the ascended Christ received ‘the promise of the Father’ (Acts 2:33), which He sent down in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As Son of God, and as conquering substitute for a fallen humanity, Christ deserved the power to dispense to all who will ever be united to Him the Spirit of God. Through the victorious raising of Christ, He is ‘made both Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2:36). He who is Lord and Christ is ‘Lord of the Spirit’, and through the ministrations of the Spirit throughout the rest of earthly time, all His enemies shall become His footstool (according to the most quoted messianic Psalm of all: 110 – cf. Acts 2:34, 35, and Psalm 110:1).

This Pentecostal exhibition of the crucified, risen, and ascended Jesus brought severe conviction to the large audience, so that they cried out to Peter and the others: ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ (v. 37). Peter showed them the way to salvation: ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost’ (v. 38).²¹ He adds the covenant promise of inclusion of the family: ‘For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call’ (v. 39). Thus, the promise made to Abraham of inclusion of his seed in the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Gen. 17:9-14) is equally gracious and extensive to the families of the New Testament believers in Christ.

In this context of repentant faith in Christ, and baptism into His Name, is anchored the coming down of the Holy Spirit to the renewed people of God. Some three thousand believed that day, and were baptized, and became a part of the on-going life of the church ‘with gladness and singleness of heart’ (vv. 41-47). While this sermon concentrates on who Christ was and

what He did, it is all presented in the context of the power of the Holy Spirit. And this reticence to reveal His role is in line with what Christ tells us in John 16:13: ‘Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.’

The Gift of the Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel

Even before Pentecost, however, John’s Gospel speaks of the breathing out of the Holy Spirit onto the disciples after Christ’s resurrection. John 20:21-23 is set in the evening of resurrection day: ‘Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.’

Some have argued that this is merely a shortened form of the Day of Pentecost, but that cannot be the case. In Acts 2, the focus is on the coming of the Holy Spirit to all the waiting people of God; but in John 20, the emphasis is on the communication of the Spirit to the disciples, to enable them to forgive and retain sins, even before the fullness of the blessing of Pentecost.²² The redemptive work of the Church would already be going on, even before the definitive equipping of all her people on Pentecost, which would excel anything previously experienced.

We could also note that what follows Jesus’ appearance falls well short of its fulfilment. One thinks of the temporary filling of the OT judges, who were given discernment and insight for a period, but which seemed to leave as quickly as it came – whether Gideon or Samson filled with the Spirit for a season, not to remain, or even Saul or his soldiers sent to pursue David (I Sam 19:19-24). In John chapter 21, Peter, seemingly directionless, returns to what he knew prior to Christ’s calling. Bringing Thomas, John and James to the sea of Tiberias, he declares to them that ‘we go fishing.’ The result is fruitless, taking the reader back to the original calling in Luke 5 where they ‘toiled all the night’ and caught nothing. Then Jesus (also pointing us again back to His words to them in that earlier episode), directs them to cast down their nets on the ‘right side of the ship.’ The result is a catch so massive that it breaks the net and which they were ‘unable to draw in’ for ‘the multitude of fishes.’ It is not hard to see that Pentecost brings an entirely different

picture of Peter and the disciples, when, seeking the Lord together in prayer, Peter is filled with boldness (*parresia*).

We should also note, that through the course of the Gospel John had progressively revealed greater depths about the Person and Work of the Spirit (to be discussed in more detail below). Once these truths had been spoken, Jesus then returns following His resurrection to begin the process of filling His disciples with the Spirit. So, in John 7:37-39, Jesus had made clear that a marvel had to occur before He would give the Holy Spirit: ‘In the last day, that great day of the feast [i.e. of Tabernacles, when traditionally water was poured out in Jerusalem], Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified).’

A major aspect of His glorification was not only the resurrection and transformation of His body, but also His going up to the Father, to present His saving work. According to Luke in Acts 1:3, Jesus ascended forty days after His resurrection. But there seem to have been one, or some previous ascensions to the Father before the final ascension. Gerrit Dawson explains:

Indeed the evidence from John’s Gospel suggests this. In John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him because he has not yet gone up, or ascended to his Father. But then he instructs her in 20:18 to go to his brothers and tell them ‘I go up to my Father and your Father’ Since Jesus had said that the Spirit could not come until he had gone away (John 16:7), this breathing out of the Spirit assumes a going up to the Father on Easter Day.²³

Thus, we can say that the breathing out of the Spirit on Easter Day is a foretaste and a foreshadowing of His outpouring at Pentecost.

The Paraclete

The Holy Spirit, breathed out on Easter Day, and abundantly poured out on Pentecost, came as the *Paraclete*. This Greek word is passive in form, and should have the meaning, ‘called to the side of ...’²⁴ Much had already been said about Him in the upper room discourse of John 14–16. Jesus

described Him in John 14:16 as ‘another paraclete.’ This indicates that Jesus Himself had already been their paraclete, but now that He is about to leave, He will send ‘another paraclete’. 1 John 2:1 describes Jesus as a paraclete. But after His ascension, He promises in John 14:18, ‘I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.’ ‘The word is always in this Gospel used by Jesus, who speaks of the Spirit as sent to supply the need of his followers after his departure. The Spirit is to be with the disciples continually, and to remind them of all that Jesus has said (14:26). He is to be their teacher, and to remind them of all that Jesus has said (14:26). He bears witness to Christ (15:26).’²⁵

The Greek word *paracletos* has not been an easy one to translate into English. John Wycliffe in his fourteenth-century translation rendered it ‘Comforter’, and that has been followed in a majority of English versions. In general, most scholars today do not believe that ‘Comforter’ is the best rendering into English, especially when one takes into account the usage of the word throughout the New Testament (which usually does not bear the sense of ‘Comforter’). But it has been easier to reject ‘Comforter’ than adequately to replace it.

‘Advocate’ has been used by the New English Bible, by Rieu, and by Weymouth. ‘Precisely because of the high standard expected [of Christians] and the certainty of judgment, they need a *paracletos*.’²⁶ C. K. Williams translates it as ‘Friend’, and Knox as ‘another to befriend you’.²⁷ ‘Because of this new work within the hearts of men, they would be able to impart streams of life-giving power to others.’²⁸ Courthial mentions several terms to express what the Paraclete does: ‘He who is called to one’s side (advocate), consoler, counsellor, guide, companion, body guard, friend ...’²⁹

It is significant that the Paraclete is given to the disciples on Easter, and to the whole waiting church on Pentecost. Although of course individuals are included, these gifts are primarily corporate. ‘The Gift’ enables each one to assist the other in reaching the common goal of Christlikeness. Thus, in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, Saint Basil says: ‘The Spirit holds the members together through the gifts that depend upon each other. All members endowed with various gifts complete the body of Christ, and in the unity of the Spirit, transmit to each other the benefit of these gifts that are necessary to all, causing all to enjoy the gifts.’³⁰

As we summarize the blessings brought by the Paraclete, it is no exaggeration when Basil describes our receiving of the Holy Spirit as ‘a return to paradise’:

Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all ‘fulness of blessing’ (Rom. 15:29), both in this world and in the world to come ³¹

In the Gift of the Spirit, God the Father gives Himself

In the biblical and patristic doctrine of the Trinity, it is necessary to keep in mind that although the Holy Trinity consists of three distinct persons, they are never divided in their substantial Godhead. When one is there, the others are there. This means that when the Spirit comes, the Son comes, and the Father comes. That is why (as we shall see later) blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is such a fatal sin.

This is clearly taught in much of the New Testament. We have previously looked at Jesus’ words in John 5:17: ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work’, as well as Romans 5:5: ‘the love of God [i.e. the Father] is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given us.’ In the discourse of John 14 and 16, Jesus says that He will come back to them, for when the Spirit comes, He comes. Paul frequently alternates between our being ‘in Christ’ and in the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is ‘Christ in you’, and ‘you in Christ’: ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27); and ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20).

At other times, it is the Spirit in you: ‘... received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?’ (Gal. 3:2); ‘And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba Father’ (Gal. 4:6, 7); ‘Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh’ (Gal. 5:16); ‘If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:25). We live in Christ; we live in the Spirit; thus when the Spirit is present and working, Christ is present and working.

Many of the Church Fathers got to the roots of this truth, and summarized it powerfully, none more so than Athanasius. In his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, he stated: ‘The Spirit is not outside the Word [i.e. Logos], but being in the Word, through him is in God. And so the spiritual gifts are given in the Triad For the Father himself through the Word in the Spirit works and gives all things.’³² He sees the Holy Spirit as the self-giving of God.³³ He adds: ‘The Holy and blessed Trinity is indivisible and one in himself. When mention is made of the Father, there is included also his Word, and the Spirit who is in the Son. If the Son is named, the Father is in the Son, and the Spirit is not outside the Word.’³⁴

Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Lecture* (XVI) made the same point, in commenting on John 16:13, 14. ‘The Father through the Son, with the Holy Ghost, is the giver of all grace; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son, and those of the Holy Ghost; for there is one salvation, one power, one faith; one God the Father; one God the Lord, His only begotten-Son; one Holy Ghost, the Comforter’³⁵

Didymus the Blind brought out the fact that the indwelling presence of the Spirit in us is the presence of God *secundum substantiam* (‘according to the very substance of God’), and not merely *secundum operationem* (‘according to his working’).³⁶ That is, in the gift of the Spirit, God, wondrously, gives us His very self.

Self-giving, Divine and human

In Christ, the self-giving of God becomes our model and our power. Staniloae explains:

Whereas the Holy Spirit did not assume human nature as his image and therefore cannot be thought of as a model for the human person, Christ, by assuming human nature as his image, is thought of as a model for the human person. But the human person cannot actually become a full image of Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit, or without the help of the Holy Spirit Christ also became the head of the Church because he has raised these first-fruits to the state of sacrifice – a state superior to an egoistic self- preoccupation – as well as to the state of resurrection ... for only through the sacrifice of offering ourselves to God do we tear down the walls that enclose us in our limitations, and thus we enter into full communion with God and with our fellow human beings.³⁷

Athanasius expands this thought: ‘When the Holy Spirit is given unto us (“Receive the Holy Spirit” – John 20:22, said the Saviour) *God is in us*; for so John wrote, “If we love one another, *God dwells in us*; hereby we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (I John 4:12). But when God is in us, the Son is also in us. For the Son himself said: “The Father and I will come and make our dwelling with him” (John 14:23). Furthermore, as the Son is life – for he says “I am the life” (John 14:6) – we are said to be quickened by the Spirit.’³⁸

Basil the Great writes: “No one knows the Father but the Son” (Matt. 11:27). And “no man can say that Jesus is Lord but in the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:3). For it is not said through the Spirit but in the Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24), as it is written “in thy light we shall see light” (Ps. 36:9), namely by the illumination of the Spirit, “the true light that enlightens every man that comes into the world” (John 1:9).’³⁹ Elsewhere, Basil summarizes the Trinitarian gift of God: ‘Our mind, enlightened by the Spirit, looks toward the Son, and in him as in an image, sees the Father.’⁴⁰ And since God Himself is the gift given, we find that God’s people are also givers. Thus Basil, the theologian of the Holy Spirit, whose teachings were confirmed in the second ecumenical council, was involved in very practical outworkings of the Gospel. He followed Matthew 25 and cared for the poor and the sick.⁴¹ In a word, his words corresponded to his life (to quote Isidore of Pelusium): proper theology produces real effects in the life of believers. Or, better yet, the Spirit produces these fruits in believers who enter in more fully to the Word. We are confronted in every direction by the Triune existence and working of God.

Gregory Nazianzus draws these truths together, with beauty: ‘No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am enlightened by the radiance of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the whole, and my vision is filled, and the greater part of what I conceive escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the others. When I contemplate the three together, I see but one luminary, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.’⁴²

Procession of the Spirit from the Being of God

The inter-Trinitarian relations of the distinct Persons within the one Being of God are ineffable. Yet we are given a little light upon them, as Scripture speaks of the Son as being only-begotten of the Father (e.g. John 3:16), and of the Holy Spirit as proceeding (cf. John 15:26 : ‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me’). Surely Athanasius was right when he showed that the procession of the Spirit from the Father is somehow connected with ‘the generation of the Son from the Father which exceeds and transcends the thoughts of men’.⁴³ We cannot seek to describe either generation or procession within the Being of God, thus we cannot accurately compare them as to how they are alike or different. Augustine honestly states the difficulty: ‘[I]t is most difficult to distinguish generation from procession in that co-eternal, and equal, and incorporeal, and ineffably unchangeable and indivisible Trinity ...’⁴⁴ But the important point is that both belong to the very Being of God. Epiphanius states that ‘The Holy Spirit is ever with the Father and the Son, proceeding from the Father and receiving from the Son.’⁴⁵

It took the bishops and councils of the Church some centuries to work out an acceptable approach to this complex question. I have sought to deal with it elsewhere in considerable historical and theological detail, and will not repeat it all here, since it is available for any who wish to study these matters.⁴⁶

In the barest outline, I will only note here that some of the Fathers sought to anchor the oneness of the Trinity in *the Person of the Father* (as some of the Cappadocians). However that raised questions about the principle or *arche* of the entire Trinity. In some accounts (as with Basil and Gregory of Nyssa), there is a tendency to posit *a cause* within the Person of the Father of the Son and the Spirit. But if accepted, then this causal idea would give us something less than the full equality of the Three Persons of the One Trinity. It implied a certain sort of subordinationism (although it never denied the full deity of Son and Spirit), and it reflected on the internal harmony of God’s eternal and ever stable Being.

But that sort of subordinationism was not followed by large numbers of the greatest teachers of the Church. Hence, a different account (one that I believe to be more fully Biblical) was rendered by such Bishops as Gregory Nazianzus, Cyril of Alexandria, Epiphanius, and others. As a result of their long and prayerful studies, they considered *the Being of the Father* (rather

than *the Person of the Father*) to be the principle of the Trinity, which meant that they denied causation of one person by another person.⁴⁷

I have discussed this elsewhere,⁴⁸ and will only refer in this place to Gregory Nazianzus: ‘I would like to call the Father greater, in that both the equality and the being of the equal ones are from him. But I am alarmed at the word “principle” (*tan archan*), lest I make him the Principle of inferiors, and insult him through the idea of precedence in honor For there is no greater or less in respect of the being of consubstantial Persons.’⁴⁹ Gregory also wrote that the relations within God are ‘beyond all time’ (*achronos*), ‘beyond all origin’ (*anarchos*), and ‘beyond all cause’ (*anaitios*).⁵⁰

1. Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Incarnation* (P&R Publishing: London & New York, 2004), p. 47.

2. Staniloae, *Vol. 4, chapter 1*.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VII. Chapter IV (p. 108).

5. Useful material can be found on the website for *Jews for Jesus*, where descriptions of the Feasts can be found to further elucidate these connections of the Passover, Pentecost and First-Fruits – <https://jewsforjesus.org/jewish-resources/jewish-holidays>.

6. Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956 reprint), p. 40.

7. John Chrysostom, quoted in J. A. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Samuel Rutherford, *Spiritual Letters*, XXVII, to Lady Halhill.

10. Stanza 4 of ‘Ancient of Days, Who sittest throned in glory,’ by William Croswell Doane (1886).

11. J. A. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

14. Courthial, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

15. Ryle, J. C., *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, St. John*, Vol. II, (London, William Hunt and Company, 1869), excerpted in www.tracts.ukgo.com/ryle_jn7_37-39.doc.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

17. Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003), pp. 99, 100.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

20. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007), p. 115.
21. Baptism 'into the name of Jesus' is precisely the same as Trinitarian baptism. 'The name of Jesus' includes the other Trinitarian persons. Saint Basil concisely explains: 'Let no one be misled by the fact of the Apostle's frequently omitting the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit when making mention of baptism, or on this account imagine that the invocation of the names is not observed. "As many of you," he says, "as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27); and again, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death" (Rom. 6:3). For the naming of Christ is the confession of the whole, shewing forth as it does the God who gave, the Son who received, and the Spirit who is the unction' (*De Spiritu Sancto*, Chapter XII).
22. Some scholars have very reasonably connected the forgiveness and retention of sins to the rabbinical custom, of 'binding' and 'loosing' to '... forbidding and permitting. But the terms were also used with respect to excommunication, when they meant "excommunicate" and "receive into communion." It is possible that this latter is what is meant in the present passage. But the terms used here are not the natural ones, which would be rather *deomai* and *luo* (as in Matt. 16:19; 18:18)' according to Leon Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971), p. 850, note 66.
23. G. Dawson, op. cit., p. 36.
24. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971), p. 662.
25. Ibid., p. 663.
26. Ibid., p. 665.
27. Ibid.
28. George E. Ladd, a New Testament scholar, well known for his *Theology of the New Testament* (1974), p. 295.
29. Courthial, op. cit., p. 84.
30. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* (PG 32:108).
31. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, Chapter XV, p. 36. It is significant to note that Basil, the theo-logian of the Holy Spirit, was also very concerned for the well-being of people's bodies. In a newly translated Homily 'On Social Justice', he gives what became the foundation of the modern hospital system, thus following Matthew 25 on care for the poor and the sick.
32. Athanasius, *Ad Serapionem*, 1.14.
33. Ibid., 1.30.
34. Ibid., 1.14.
35. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XVI, p. 24.
36. Didymus, *De Spiritu Sancto*, p. 23.
37. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, p. 15, 16.
38. Athanasius, op. cit., 1.19.
39. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, p. 47.
40. Basil, *Epistula* (i.e. *Letter*), p. 236.
41. BASIL'S NEWLY TRANSLATED HOMILIES 'ON SOCIAL JUSTICE' REFERENCE ACTS 2 AND 4 AS THE BASIS of what would later become the Basiliad, and actually, the foundations of the modern hospital system.
42. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.1.

43. Athanasius, *De Decretis*, 12.
44. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XXVII. Chapter 27 (p. 225).
45. Epiphanius, *Ancoratus*, 6.
46. Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Vol. One*, see in particular: Chapter Eight – ‘The CHRISTIAN CHURCH THINKS THROUGH HOW GOD IS ONE BEING AND THREE PERSONS’ (PP. 485-518); CHAPTER EIGHT: APPENDIX ONE – ‘THE DIFFERING APPROACHES OF THE CAPPADOCIANS AND AUGUSTINE TO THE TRINITY’ (PP. 519-28), AND CHAPTER NINE: APPENDIX ONE – ‘ON THE FILIOQUE’ (PP. 563-77).
47. See the significant discussion of these two differing lines among the Church Fathers on ‘procession’ in T. F. Torrance, ‘*The Eternal Spirit*’ in *The Trinitarian Faith* (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 191-251.
48. Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Volume One*, op. cit., Chapter Nine, Appendix One, pp. 563-77. There we look at the differences between the Eastern and Western Churches on this matter from the Middle Ages to the present.
49. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 43.30.
50. Gregory, op. cit., 29. 2.

CHAPTER 4

SPIRIT BAPTISMS BEYOND PENTECOST

The supreme baptism of the Church by the Holy Spirit occurred at Pentecost, but other Spirit baptisms took place after that, as the church was expanded. It is another way of expressing that regeneration, which brings us, and all who believe the message, into the resurrection body of Christ. Issues involved in our coming into the immediate reality of Christ's dwelling within us are discussed, including tongues.

Here we go a historical step beyond the events of Pentecost, just looked at. There we saw that Pentecost marked a new stage in the opening of the Covenant of Grace, an accompaniment of the unique enthronement of the risen Christ. As such, it needed no repetition, for it completed the events of Christ's ministry, until He comes back in power and glory. It would remain the fount of the life and expansion of the Christian Church to the end of time. Nothing could stand beside it, any more than anything could stand beside Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. From that fount would continue to flow every 'baptism of the Spirit into the body of Christ' of all who come to belief in Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

Yet Scripture shows us that there were further Spirit baptisms as the Church expanded into such places as Samaria, the house of Cornelius, and at Ephesus. What took place in Samaria shows that the Lord's grace had already worked, when people believed the preaching of Philip, and were baptized (Acts 8:4-12). There is nothing in the text to suggest that their experience up to that point was not genuine.

Once the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans believed and were baptized, they sent Peter and John unto them, '... that they might receive the Holy Ghost' (Acts 8:14, 15). Verse 16 adds: 'For as yet, he [the Holy Spirit] was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

F. F. Bruce shows the particular situation of the new believers in Samaria, which seems to explain why the two leading apostles were sent to

them: ‘... some special evidence may have been necessary to assure these Samaritans, so accustomed to being despised as outsiders by the people of Jerusalem, that they were fully incorporated into the new community of the people of God. Not until they had been acknowledged and welcomed by the leaders of the Jerusalem church did they experience the signs which confirmed and attested their membership of the Spirit-possessed company.’¹

G. H. W. Lampe states: ‘The preaching of the Gospel in Samaria represented a crucial moment in the first advance of Christianity. Hence, after the Baptism of the first Samaritan converts, the leaders of the Church’s mission come down from Jerusalem and by the sign of fellowship and “contact” incorporate them into the apostolic (i.e. missionary) Church, with the result that there occurs a Samaritan “Pentecost”, at least to the extent that visible signs are manifested at the outpouring of the Spirit.’²

When the apostles laid hands on these Samaritan believers, they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17). John Calvin seems on solid ground when he teaches that the Samaritans already had the Holy Spirit, since they were regenerated. But the laying on of hands gave them more: ‘... forasmuch as the Samaritans were already endued with the Spirit of adoption; the excellent graces of the Spirit were heaped upon them, in which God showed to his Church, for a time, as it were, the visible presence of his Spirit, that he might establish for ever the authority of his gospel, and also testify that his Spirit shall always be governor and director of the faithful.’³

Acts sets forth another Spirit baptism (in this case, marked by speaking in tongues) as Peter went to the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 10:19-48). Samaria represents a special case in the expansion of the gospel beyond traditional Judaism, and the events of Caesarea represent an even more pivotal event, in that the class of the Gentiles (in principle, the rest of the world), were brought into Christ. What happened there marks the beginning of the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commission to the whole world (cf. Matt. 28). In that rich historical sense, it belongs to a unique class of spiritual happenings that laid the foundation of Christianity. As we shall see, there is reason to think that this Spirit baptism, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is foundational.

For instance, Peter preached the way of salvation through faith in Christ, and the Holy Ghost descended with power that caused them to magnify God. We see what this meant in

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God (Acts 10:44-46).

There was another Spirit baptism in Ephesus, where the disciples were not aware of who the Holy Spirit was. Paul asked them:

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them: and they spake with tongues, and prophesied (Acts 19:2-6).

It is clear that these believers (in both Caesarea and Samaria) experienced a two-stage work: regeneration, and then baptism in the Spirit. That is also the case in Ephesus, but there is a difference. The believers in Caesarea and Samaria are clearly identified as Christians, while those in Ephesus (only twelve in number) do not necessarily merit that description. It appears that they were basically disciples of John the Baptist, who had not received Christian baptism. It was only at this point that they seem to have grasped the fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and so were baptized into His Name. As F. F. Bruce writes of them: '... they were one group of disciples who gladly abandoned an intermediate position when presented with a fuller gospel.'⁴ Or as J. A. Alexander remarks: 'Paul's doubt as to their baptism did not arise from the absence of these gifts, but from their imperfect knowledge of the true religion.'⁵ Therefore, the Spirit baptism of the twelve Ephesian disciples cannot be used as an indication of a regular two-stage work throughout church history. Rather, it was when they entered into true faith that they experienced the Holy Spirit.

Baptism and the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:13

What Paul teaches about Spirit baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13 shows that every blessing of being in Christ (such as regeneration and faith) comes from the Spirit baptizing us into Him: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.'

The basic ethnic division within the early Church was that between Jew and Gentile. Here Paul is saying that all come into Christ exactly the same way: through baptism into His body by the Holy Ghost. To be saved is to be in Christ; to be in Christ is only wrought by the baptism of the Spirit. He is the One who takes us out of the First Adam, and into the Last Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12-21, and 1 Cor. 15:22). He is a 'life-giving' Spirit, and regeneration of the lost into the body of Christ is a continuing miracle, causing us to participate in the saving activities of Christ (2 Cor. 13:14), constitutive of the Church through all the ages.

This means that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is absolutely basic to becoming a Christian. Every person who is saved receives it; without it, one is not in union with Christ and His saving activities, as well with all other believers (also members of the body of Christ). No one is saved as an orphan, but into a living body. It is an incorporation into a spiritual organism, of which Christ is the head. Ephesians 2:15 speaks of this body as a 'new man', composed of 'twain' (i.e. both Jew and Gentile). Again, in Ephesians 2:15, Paul speaks of those baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ as 'making in himself of twain [i.e. Jew and Gentile] one new man ...' In Galatians 3:27, he speaks of this baptism in slightly different terms: 'For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' Romans 6:2 expresses it as being 'baptized into his death.' Then sharing in His resurrection follows as part of the process: 'For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection ...'

This baptism in the Spirit is also explained in different terms, in the parallel expression of the same verse as 'have been all made to drink into one Spirit.' One commentator crisply comments: 'The accusative *hen pneuma* [i.e. "one spirit"] is retained in the passive as often with verbs that in the active take two accusatives. The reference is to a definite act in the past, probably to the inward experience of the Holy Spirit symbolized by the act of baptism.'⁶

John Calvin gets right to the point: ‘How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son – not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich us poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called “our Head” (Eph. 4:15), and “the first-born among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). We also, in turn, are said to “put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27); for as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we receive this by faith ... [we must] examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.’⁷

Various images can be used of our coming into Christ. In this text, Paul speaks of our being baptized into one body, and drinking into one Spirit. In Ephesians 1, he speaks of our eyes being opened in faith, so that we share in the resurrection of Christ:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places ... (vv. 17-20).

We mere humans are not given an explanation of how this miracle of regeneration in Spirit-baptism happens. We are simply told the results: ‘For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father’ (Eph. 2:18). As Jesus said when He was speaking of the new birth in John 3, there is a mysterious element in the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit within the human soul: ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth [wishes to go], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit’ (v. 8).

Why the Holy Spirit is appropriate to bond believers into Union with Christ

Drawing from John Calvin's *Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles*,⁸ Ronald S. Wallace summarizes Calvin's teaching on how the Holy Spirit bonds believers on earth with Christ in heaven:

It is therefore the Holy Spirit alone who can effect this union, for it is the Holy Spirit alone who can so join things in heaven and things on earth that heavenly things can be grasped by human minds and that the life and virtue of what is in heaven can be shared by those who are yet on earth (*Commentary on Gal. 2:20*, *Calvini Opera* 50. 199, and *Sermon on Job 15:11-16*, *Calvini Opera* 33.720). It is the Holy Spirit alone who can bring into real being that wonderful relation of mystery between Christ's heavenly body and his Church on earth, which is so clearly depicted in the act of participation in the Lord's Supper and in Baptism.⁹

This is the most basic baptism of all; the baptism by the Spirit into the body of Christ, and every other baptism and blessing of the Spirit directly depends upon it. This means that the Holy Spirit supernaturally brings us into direct union with the body of the risen Christ. All our witness-bearing as Christians in a needy world flows from this essential baptism, so that Christ says: 'But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye shall also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning' (John 15:26, 27).

The 'tongues' in 1 Corinthians 14

First Corinthians 14 does not deal with the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, but we look at it here, since we are on the theme of speaking in tongues, that is 'languages'. Tongues in this chapter are not said to be the result of a baptism in the Holy Spirit, but rather one of the many 'spiritual gifts.' Paul gives instructions to the Church at Corinth concerning this matter, which at times was disruptive in that church. He definitely allows tongues (vv. 2-5, 18, 39). He considers it to be one of the spiritual gifts (v. 12). But in a public worship service, it is to be done in a way that edifies the congregation, so that the people can understand, and say Amen at the

conclusion (vv. 14-16). Hence, tongues are to be interpreted so that they minister prophecy to the body (vv. 26-31). In orderly fashion, only two or three are to speak, one at the time (vv. 29-31). If there is no one in church who can interpret, then the would-be tongues speaker is to keep silence (v. 30).

Scholars are divided on whether the tongues spoken and interpreted in Corinth were real languages or ecstatic utterances. According to D. A. Carson, some ‘... argue that modern tongues and the tongues in Corinth alike are not so-called real languages at all ... [and view them] primarily as a more intense prayer experience in the worship of the inexpressible God. [Michael Green¹⁰] suggests that some tongues may be real languages and others not.’ Dunn supports the view that the tongues at Corinth were not real languages, partly on the grounds that the subject matter is ‘mysteries’, which he understands to be eschatological secrets known only in heaven, and partly on the grounds that if Paul thought the gift of tongues utilized real foreign languages he could not have *compared* them with real foreign languages in 14:10ff. Carson, however, does not accept this, for ‘... Paul is capable of expressing heavenly mysteries *in Greek*: see I Corinthians 15:51-52 – so there is no necessary connection between mysteries and noncognitive speech.’¹¹

Some have argued that the kind of glossolalia (i.e. speaking in tongues) spoken by Charismatics today is to be identified with ‘the tongues of angels’ (1 Cor. 13:1). Dr Gordon Fee writes that some ancient Jewish sources mentioned that angels had their own heavenly language.¹² None of us really knows anything about that matter. The least we can say is that anytime an angel spoke in Holy Scripture, he used a normal human language.¹³

The safest interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:1 is to understand that it introduces the theme of love (charity). Paul is using hyperbolic terminology to do so, when he says: ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love), I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.’ What he means is that if I lack love (which he did not lack), but could speak most impressively like the angels, it would amount to nothing but clanging noise. Thus, his concern was to be the edification of others, not to be impressive. Careful exegesis is not being followed when one takes from this single verse (in a hyperbolic passage) an identity

between glossolalia and angelic tongues. To do so seems to be a sort of exegetical desperation!

Are Tongues to be Expected as a ‘second blessing’ after conversion?

One of the sharpest controversies among true Christians since about 1900 has been whether or not to expect speaking in tongues as a regularly given blessing after sinners are converted to Christ. Certainly, this did occur a few times in the New Testament, and we have already examined these passages: Pentecost (Acts 2), Samaria (Acts 8), Caesarea (Acts 10), and Ephesus (Acts 19).

The Spirit baptism and the accompanying speaking in tongues that occurred in those cases after regeneration are in no sense to be downplayed. However, following many scholars who have carefully dealt with this matter, such as R. B. Gaffin and George Knight, it should be considered that to understand the significance of these texts, it is necessary to consider the larger structure of what is happening in the Acts of the Apostles. Professor Gaffin makes an important distinction between the events of the history of salvation, and the ensuing order of salvation.¹⁴

The History of Salvation refers to the great events of Christ’s incarnate ministry that saved God’s people and constituted the Church in its New Testament phase (thus fulfilling the Old Testament promises): His incarnation, holy life, atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and sending down of the Holy Spirit. Gaffin writes: ‘... Spirit and fire baptism is to be nothing less than the culmination of the Messiah’s ministry; it will serve to stamp that ministry as a whole, just as in comparison, water baptism was an index for John’s entire ministry (Luke 20:4; Acts 10:37).’¹⁵ After mentioning resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost, he adds: ‘Pentecost, then, is no more capable of being a repeatable paradigm event than are the other events. It is anomalous, to say the least, to view one of these events (Pentecost) as a repeatable model for the individual Christian experience and the other three (Jesus’ resurrection, ascension, and reception of the Spirit) as nonrepeatable, once-for-all events.’¹⁶

While these events are forever established and once-for-all, what does continue is what we call ‘the order of salvation.’ It is the continuing appropriation of the finished work of Christ in the experience of believers,

whereby they are forever united to Christ in His death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1 and 2, etc.). We will look at this ‘order of salvation’ later in more careful detail. For the present we will merely note with Gaffin that ‘Union with Christ in his death and resurrection is not a matter of replicating these events, by analogy in our ongoing experience; believers do not have a death experience as distinct from a resurrection experience – whether temporally or causally. Rather, at conversion we are definitely united to the exalted Christ and so continue to share in who he is as the crucified and resurrected Lord.’¹⁷

Apostolicity and Canon

It has often been correctly pointed out that many of the miraculous gifts were given to the apostles. But, as Carson shows, ‘the term “apostle” can be broader than the original twelve, as Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Paul’s agents to the churches (2 Cor. 8:22-23) ... [it] may be roughly equivalent to “missionaries” or the like.’¹⁸

And these miraculous gifts given to apostles and others, following the Lord Jesus Christ, certainly served to accredit the truth claims of these leaders, but they served other purposes as well. As Carson writes: ‘The healing and other miracles of Jesus are explicitly connected not only with the *person* of Jesus, *but also with the new age he is inaugurating.*’¹⁹ Carson rightly states: ‘But because miraculous signs have a distinctly attesting role in some instances, it does not follow that this is the *only* role they play.’²⁰

Therefore the argument (of B. B. Warfield and others), that once the writings of the apostles and companions in the New Testament had become canonized, miracles ceased, does not follow. Although we are not to underrate the foundational significance of the apostles, we are also not to underrate the wider work of the Holy Spirit in the general life of the church, a work that goes on long after the foundations are laid.

Now, one essential qualification of an apostle was that he had to have seen the risen Christ. Paul was the last to do so. Hence, since that time, the Lord had no need to appoint other apostles; without having seen the risen Lord, they could not have been in that category. They were chosen by Christ to lay the foundation of the church in their ministries, which were accompanied by many miracles, and particularly to write the inspired scriptures of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul, for example, writes:

‘For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed. Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ’ (Rom. 15:18-19).

As Dr Mike Kruger says: ‘Acts 1:22 describes the two main characteristics of apostles – namely that they must be present from the “beginning” (*arxamenos*) and must be foundational witnesses (*martura*) to the resurrection. This forms a striking parallel with those “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses” in Luke 1:2 (compare Acts 10:37). Additionally, this same combination occurs in John 15:27, when Jesus describes his disciples, “And you will also bear witness (*martureite*), because you have been with me from the beginning (*ap’ arxas*)”.’²¹

In other words, some things did cease after the finish of the careers of the apostles, and one of them was the writing of Holy Scripture; on this nearly every Christian is agreed. Therefore, the need for miraculous signs to validate their teaching was now past, since their doctrine was ever available to the church, as given in Holy Scripture, and witnessed to by the Holy Spirit to believers. Signs and wonders were not impossible, but did not have the same function once the New Testament was completed, for the Scriptures shone in their own light, as witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.

With the closing of the canon of the New Testament, to be ‘apostolic’ was to follow faithfully the inspired teachings of the original apostles. The last chapter in the Bible, Revelation 22, warns: ‘For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book’ (vv. 18-19).

It is clear that the foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone, and through His choice, the prophets and apostles are considered ‘the foundation’ by Paul, in Ephesians 2:19-20. These apostles were not replaced after their founding work in writing the New Testament. As Dr George Knight writes: ‘The data in the New Testament show that once Judas (the betrayer) was replaced, there were no more replacements for the other apostles, and the same evaluation is implied for the prophets

joined so closely with the apostles. The non-replacement of the apostles is evident in the reference in the book of Revelation that the wall of the Jerusalem to come has “twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14) It should be clear that these offices are not perpetual in the life of the church, but they served rather as the once-laid foundation for the church ...’²²

Prophecy

Thus, not only apostles fulfilled their appointed ministry in the New Testament era, and were not replaced by others, and it seems to be the same with the category identified in the New Testament as ‘prophets.’ The Old Testament prophets could truthfully say: *‘Thus saith the Lord.’* They were able to explicate current events in the light of Scripture, and also were able to predict the future from having God’s plan revealed to them. It was much the same in the New Testament. John the Baptist was regarded as a prophet (cf. Matt. 14:5 and Mark 11:32). His call to immediate repentance was in the mode of Old Testament prophets (cf. Matt. 3:7-10; Luke 3:7-9). Jesus was often considered to be a prophet (cf. Matt. 21:46; Mark 6:15; 8:28). Moses and Elijah were expected to return before Christ (Matt. 11:9-14), and actually did so on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9). Those who were prophets in the New Testament had the ability to discern the inner secrets of others, leading to their repentance (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24-25). They could select people for various tasks (cf. Acts 13:1-3). They could guide the church in making important decisions (1 Cor. 16:6-10), and could predict the future (cf. Acts 11:27-28; 20:23; 21:10-11). They could solve disputes (cf. Acts 15:28, 32). I believe that Carson is correct when he suggests that the true successors of the Old Testament prophets were—in the New Testament—the apostles.²³ He shows that, whereas in the New Testament, the oracles of prophets were to be evaluated, the teaching of the apostles was not.²⁴

Certainly, many times in church history (including the Reformation and Puritan days), faithful preachers of the Bible have been called by analogy ‘prophets.’²⁵ But a post-canonical preacher is not the same as ‘prophet’ in Old and New Testaments. That is, Old and New Testament prophets were channels of divine revelation, given directly to and through them. In Acts

2:16 and 17-18, ‘the verb “prophesy” is used once in both verses, and where Joel 2:28-32 is cited as being fulfilled.’²⁶

The category of prophet bears the same high authority in both Testaments. A false prophet in the Old Testament was to be stoned, either if his prophecy did not come true, or if he sought to move the people away from the revealed will of God. Thus, he stood in God’s presence, so that his words were God’s words; to reject him was to reject God. Elijah was typical of the true prophet when he said: ‘*As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand ...*’, and in the next verse, it is said: ‘*And the word of the Lord came unto him ...*’ (1 Kings 17:1,2)²⁷.

Not only did the Old Testament prophet receive revelation from God; so did the New Testament prophet. In 1 Corinthians 14:26, Paul calls prophecy ‘revelation’. In verse 30, Paul writes ‘about “a revelation” being given to one of the prophets’. ²⁸ Paul in Ephesians 3:5 connects prophets and apostles as unique instruments of the Holy Spirit in receiving revelation: ‘Which in ages past was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit ...’

2 Peter 3:2 shows that the New Testament apostles stood on the same high ground as Old Testament prophets. Kruger notes: ‘... the reader is asked to submit to “the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.” The manner in which the author juxtaposes “prophets” of the old covenant and the “apostles” of the new covenant shows that he views them as two equal sources of divine authority.’

The preaching of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium was accompanied by ‘signs and wonders’ (Acts 14:3). Paul mentions this connection between the words of the apostles, and the signs which followed them: ‘Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds’ (2 Cor. 12:12).

This means that the words of the prophets, frequently accompanied by signs and wonders, are directly inspired by God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), and are thus infallible truth. It will not do to restrict the inspiration of Scripture to the Old Testament alone, for Peter refers to the writings of Paul as ‘scripture’ (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Therefore, the New Testament version of both prophet and apostle includes the ability to write words of Scripture, which are inspired and infallible. This has not been the case with even the

best preachers after the close of the New Testament, for only direct inspiration guarantees infallibility.

If the canon is closed (the normative assumption of the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years), and if the apostles do not have replacements, being that they are part of the foundation which once-for-all has been laid, then the particular signs that validated their ministries would no longer be needed. Dr Knight adds: ‘This fact has further implications, namely, that not all of the spiritual gifts continue in the life of the post-apostolic church.’²⁹ However, if it be the case that these gifts were not only to accredit the apostles, but had other purposes as well, then some of them may well have continued, as they were also serving other goals.

While the origin of the ‘canon’ (a list of books that the early church considered to be fully inspired) is somewhat mysterious, its influence upon the community of faith from very early times (probably from the late first, and on into the fourth century) was publicly manifest. Brevard Childs has stated the position carefully:

Canon consciousness thus arose at the inception of the Christian church and lies deep within the New Testament literature itself. There is an organic continuity in the historical process of the development of an established canon of sacred writings from the earliest stages of the New Testament to the final canonical stabilization of its scope.³⁰

The theory of some scholars after the time of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment that the canon was *extrinsic*, that is, that it did not arise from the church’s intrinsically recognizing the inspiration of the various books, but was rather imposed on the church *from outside*: it was ‘a later ecclesiastical creation’, as Kruger summarizes the extrinsic position; an effort to increase the ecclesiastical power of the later leadership.³¹ Others suggested that the formation of the canon was a reaction to heretical movements such as the popularity of Marcion, who denied major portions of Holy Scripture, or the Pentecostal-type Montanists, who held to new revelations coming through their leaders. Kruger devotes major portions of his book to refuting the various forms of this *extrinsic* concept.³²

B. B. Warfield of Princeton argued that church history since the post-apostolic times did not experience miraculous sign gifts. His research was historical, but did not deal with any exegetical issues.³³ These exegetical

issues have been recently addressed by Richard Gaffin, who lays major emphasis on the eschatological nature of the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁴ He notes that this emphasis had not been brought to light in the time of Warfield, and states that it is ‘the rediscovery of the already/ not yet structure of New Testament eschatology [characteristic of the age to come]’. He adds, after referring to Acts 2:22-31: ‘... in sequence: resurrection-ascension-reception of the Spirit. The last element, Pentecost, is climatic and final; there is nothing “second” about it. Resurrection-ascension-Pentecost, though distinct in time, constitute a unified complex of events; a once-for-all, salvation-historical unity; they are inseparable. *Second experiences as analogies to Pentecost?* Pentecost, then, is no more capable of being a repeatable paradigm event than are the other events.’³⁵

But by the end of what may be called the apostolic age, the church understood the Scriptures to have been written. But God’s direct presence and power continued to intervene in the life of his church. Healings continued, though generally, as far as we can tell, through the prayers of the elders of the church (cf. James 5). And, of course, the church kept thriving in the atmosphere of the supernatural presence and working of God. From then to the very end of the age, the miracle of the new birth has brought forth countless hosts of believers from sin to salvation, and the continual descent of the transforming presence of God into the worship of His church has continued apace (cf. Ps. 22:3 and 1 Cor. 15:21-25).

While Scripture itself nowhere suggests an absolute cessation of signs and wonders, we find in the Pastoral Epistles considerably more emphasis on what comes to be called ‘the ordinary means of grace’: Scripture reading, preaching and worship in church, and prayer; individual and corporate. First and Second Timothy and Titus breathe a different atmosphere from the events of Acts. They show us how the life of the church was to be ordered for all time to come, with the appointed structure of elders and deacons, and presbyteries. Although, in the nature of the case, the churches could no longer be run by the original apostles, they remained ever faithful to the original apostolic doctrine.

Deism

Regardless of one’s position on all of the spiritual gifts from the time of Christ to the present, it will not do to employ Deism to establish the

position one way or the other. Deism came into intellectual prominence with the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. It assumed (on a philosophical, not a scientific, basis) a disconnect between God and the world, so that He did not have direct access to it. In this realm of thought, the hostility to a fixed and ancient canon has been considerable, as Roger Beckwith noted: ‘... the obvious fact that an open canon was congenial to contemporary Christian free-thinking, for no-one needed to regard himself as committed to the teaching given in books which could not with certainty be identified ... a diluted concept of biblical inspiration was being introduced, and even this was denied to large parts of the Old Testament.’³⁶

Major Biblical truths were denied in terms of these crucially changed views of authority, such as the incarnation and blood atonement of Christ; His resurrection; the miracles; intercessory prayer; and the reality of heaven and hell. That is what so largely destroyed the mainline Protestant Churches of the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it has left a grim and bitter heritage to the culture at large.

But this disconnect between the living God and His world is anything but the position of almost universal Christianity (until fairly recent times). Indeed, one reason why what we now call ‘Secular Humanism’ has been so fiercely opposed to the Christian Churches (whether charismatic or not) is precisely because they affirm the supernatural reality of God and the truth of His written Word, and still call people to live by it.

Vital Christianity is the destruction of the deistic philosophy of Secular Humanism, which, with all its purported tolerance, cannot possibly tolerate Christianity! By means of the Holy Spirit, God still meets sinners through illumining His Word in the life of the church, and their lives, and eventually their cultures, become supernaturally transformed. As that occurs, they tend to change their law structures in a more God-honoring direction (such, for instance, as outlawing abortion), and this causes massive controversy with those who oppose basic principles of holiness. And such is the case today.

Once again, lest anyone feel that this non-continuation of the apostolate and its related gifts indicates that God is not so strong as ever, and that His people are somehow bereft of His needed presence, it is of utmost importance that we remember who He is, and how His eternal plan worked as He laid these continuing foundations in the New Testament.

God is the very One who faints not, nor grows weary, for as the eternal One He is outside the bondage and decay of time. Jesus Christ is ‘the same,

yesterday, today, and forever' (Heb. 13:8), and the third person of the Trinity is '*the eternal Spirit*' (Heb. 9:14). Not continuing the apostolate and its signatory gifts is no indication that He is less able to do wonders than before! He gives us all the equivalent blessings known in the apostolic age, but now through the 'means of grace' of the Christian Church. These equivalent blessings are no longer the foundational ones given to the apostles, but always flow from that once-for-all foundation; that is, the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ, conveyed to us, body, soul, and spirit in the Holy Spirit, so that 'for us to live is Christ' (Phil. 1:21). Thus, His plan is that we share in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, which is precisely the goal of the apostolic gifts: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

Views on Continuation

But around 1900, many Christians moved away from the 'cessationist' position (which word they had never heard!) and began to affirm enthusiastically what we now call 'continuationism' (that is, the apostolic signs have now been restored – although most of them deny that the apostolic office is back, or that Scripture is now being written). In particular, Christian believers since the spread of the California Asuza Street Revival (which featured considerable tongues speaking) have preached that apostolic wonders are now restored to the church.

Certainly, the believers now affirming the restoration of apostolic gifts are not lacking in numbers. Philip Jenkins writes that 'The Center for the Study of Global Christianity states that the number of charismatic/Pentecostal believers was 582 million in 2000, potentially rising to over 800 million by 2025.'³⁷

What then could we say concerning the belief of many millions of true Christians that they have experienced apostolic signs, such as restoration of true prophecy and speaking in tongues? Are these modern prophecies in the same category as those of Old and New Testament? That is the pertinent question. Dr Wayne Grudem, for example, holds to a mild form of the authority of modern prophecy, but is careful not to place it on the high ground of inspired Scripture. Thus, he has sought to create a middle way

between ‘cessationism’ and ‘continuationism,’ and he does so in charitable fashion. In his *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, in order to affirm that miraculous prophecy continues today, he holds that the charismatic prophecy of our time is not infallibly inspired, as was the prophecy of the New Testament.³⁸

He creates the category of ‘fallible prophecy.’ He seeks to demonstrate this kind of prophecy from the New Testament itself. He treats the prophecies of Agabus in Acts 11:28 and 21:10-11 as an illustration of fallible prophecy. But a careful reading of the text does not show that Agabus’ prophecy was wrong. He correctly predicted that Paul would be bound in Jerusalem (and thus urged him not to go), and what he said would happen did in fact happen. Thus His prophecy was not fallible: it was infallibly true. This leads us to make a significant distinction: although prophecy concerning his own future was correct, Paul responded to it in a different way from ordinary. He did not conclude that it should stop him from going to Jerusalem, even though he knew it was true. An apostle surely has that prerogative!

Yet let us say that while we do not find clear examples in Scripture of fallible prophecy, and the practice of tongues continues, it is much less clear what happened after the closing of the canon. There is little related in the centuries of church history concerning tongues. We do not need to deny that millions of believers have had some kind of mystical experience of the Holy Spirit. Even if we find it hard to accept that they actually were speaking in tongues of the same sort as the apostles and other New Testament believers, why deny that they met the Lord in His grace to them?

Mysticism

For example, tongues speaking may be considered a sort of *mysticism*, which from a Christian perspective (and mystical experiences are found in Hinduism and Islam) is a sense of meeting directly with God in His gracious presence. When it is valid Christian mysticism, it will always be accompanied by ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:22, 23), which we will discuss later. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose *Sermons on the Song of Songs* was so frequently drawn upon by John Calvin, would be a good illustration of a true Christian mysticism. What it really means is an experiential sense, flowing out of our union with Christ (cf. Rom. 6:1-10; Gal. 2:20, etc.).

Some believers may experience it in one way, and some in another, and some may have very little sense of it, if at all. But no one is called upon to judge harshly the other. That sort of judgement should be reserved to higher hands.

Taking them at their best, we might respond to these experiences with three observations: (1) illumination, (2) the cry of sonship, and (3) new fillings of the Spirit. (1) It may well be the case that what some Pentecostals and Charismatic have interpreted as a sort of new revelation or prophecy, given directly to them by the Holy Spirit, was actually what the church has long called 'illumination' by the Spirit of what has been already revealed in Scripture. Calvin's comments on this reality are to the point:

But I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of His Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what has been divinely commanded. Isaiah very aptly expresses this connection in these words: 'My Spirit which is in you, and the words that I have put in your mouth, and the mouths of your offspring, shall never fail' [Isa. 59:21].³⁹

It is no unusual experience for a believer suddenly to understand a truth of Scripture with power. He or she has read it for many years, yet now it comes alive to them with vitality and freshness. Nothing has been added to Scripture, but something has happened inside of them to open their understanding. That is part of the work of the Holy Spirit when He illumines afresh the Word which He originally inspired. That alone can make transformative changes in one's life, at least for the person who experiences it; it may seem like a new revelation. It is not new, for it is the ever ancient and ever fresh revelation of God. Yet it is new to them. Thus, depending on who their teachers are, they may interpret it in different ways.

(2) The Cry of Sonship is another powerful experience in the Christian life that some might believe is in the category of a new 'baptism' (that includes the coming down of God's power inside one's life) from the Spirit, or actually they may think that it is the only spiritual baptism they have ever known! It is a direct interchange with God, that feels as much a coming into

His gracious presence as something like speaking in tongues seems to mean to many. They may even confuse the two!

Romans 8:14-21 declares: 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' At very least, the subject of this experience speaks one word in a foreign tongue (in this case, Aramaic)—'Abba'—an intimate word for one's father! But of course, 'Abba' would have been known by speakers of Hebrew and Aramaic, and so does not constitute an instance of the supernatural gift of tongues.

We see here both the witness of the believer's spirit and that of the Holy Spirit, who gives it. This is a direct, immediate consciousness that one belongs to the family of God; that God loves him or her forever, and it would be hard to find anything greater than that blessing in all our earthly lives! In Romans 8:15 it is the believer who says 'Abba Father', and In Galatians 4:6, Paul says that it is the Spirit Himself who cries out 'Abba Father.' It is both, and we are fully conscious of this divinely given witness as to our blessed status.

As to the time of this witness, 1 Corinthians 12:13, which speaks of our being baptized into Christ, is sufficient to indicate that we are already given the spirit of sonship when we become sons, that is, in our new birth in Christ. Yet there may well be times beyond that when we become keenly aware of this happy relationship in a new way. Some believers may understand this witness to be a totally new 'revelation', and if one word is prominent in it (Abba), they may think that it is something akin to tongues. One suspects that part of this basic understanding of the spiritual life depends upon the teaching that people regularly receive in their churches: sometimes, very good; sometimes, leaving much to be desired.

(3) The 'filling of the Spirit' is another experience that some Christians may interpret as a new revelation, perhaps not unlike what some think happens in speaking with tongues. Paul commands in Ephesians 5:18: 'And be ye not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.' Although Pentecost is once-for-all, the filling of the Spirit seems to be an on-going occurrence in the Christian life. Certainly, Paul teaches that it is repeatable by virtue of this command.

The Holy Spirit brings sinners to the new birth as they have their eyes and hearts open to trust in Christ. That is foundational and happens only once. We have only one physical birth, and one spiritual birth. But there is also the filling of the Spirit, which, while always dependent on one's original union with Christ in regeneration, can take place over and over, as needed. 'And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.' We have here a clue as to what this 'filling with the Spirit' means by looking at what Paul opposes it to: '... be not drunk with wine.' Excess of wine will definitely shape (usually in a very negative direction) the personality who is subject to a great deal of alcohol.

But in a very different way – this time, with one that is profoundly holy (unlike drunkenness), one's personality is moved in a different direction than it would be without the extra influence. That influence is the Holy Spirit, and in the immediate context following this command, the person being filled 'sings ... and makes melody to the Lord' (Eph. 5:19); he or she 'gives thanks to God for all things' (v. 20); and wives and husbands 'submit to one another in the fear of God.' To maintain a good marriage, both Christian partners need to keep seeking the filling of the Holy Spirit!

The text does not tell us what, if any, feelings may be involved when the believer has a new filling of the Spirit. Rather, the text of Ephesians 5 deals with behavior that is moving us in a more Christ-like direction. Yet feelings may not be absent, for one has to be resolved in a new way to please the Lord, and that may well indicate a new sense of cleansing and of new empowering for service, and withal, a keener sense of what God wants from us as told us in His Word. At times, this may not be far from what older writers spoke of as 'the sweetness of a new surrender.' Whether or not that would make people feel that they had had a supernatural infusion of the Holy Spirit is not easy to say. However, one suspects that some feel that it is, and may connect it to a down-coming of the Spirit, which may or may not be attended with other spiritual manifestations.

This may be in line with Sam Storms, a Calvinist charismatic pastor and author, when he reflects on his first experience of speaking in tongues, an event that he was more inclined to view as a powerful filling of the Holy Spirit rather than Spirit baptism. He writes: 'When I look for words to describe it, the only thing that comes to mind is immersion and saturation, a sense of being inundated or flooded with the presence of God.'⁴⁰

Some problems arising from the modern Charismatic movement

These observations have sought to put the best light upon charismatic/Pentecostal experiences. But realistically, there is a darker side. Dr John MacArthur has extensively discussed the potentially negative aspects of the modern tongues movement in his *Strange Fire*.⁴¹ He begins by arguing that modern glossolalia is not the same as the languages that were spoken by those who felt under the power of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.⁴² He also shows inaccurate predictions made by many of modern tongues speakers.⁴³ He discusses false healings (often accompanied by glossolalia).⁴⁴ He argues strongly the case for apostolic cessation.⁴⁵

It has long been pointed out, especially since the Second Great Awakening (i.e. the long revival lasting from the 1780s to the 1830s) that some ‘spiritual’ manifestations, such as falling to the ground and making strange noises like animals, as well as shouting and speaking in tongues, are likely related to the psychological suggestion induced by what is happening to large groups of people around one. In some cases, it may be a sort of ‘mob psychology.’ That does not explain it all away, but it is a matter to be kept in mind in any fair assessment of some of the ‘revival’ manifestations through the years. This observation does not imply insincerity; indeed, the persons affected by it may not even be aware at all of how much the strange changes coming upon others *around* them could be affecting them.

Jonathan Edwards has no hesitation in speaking well of the feelings that God’s people experience when the Holy Spirit manifests more fully the presence of Jesus within them:

What notions have they of religion, that reject what has been described, as not true religion? What shall we find to answer those expressions in Scripture – ‘The peace of God that passeth all understanding: rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory, in believing in and loving an unseen Saviour; – All joy and peace in believing; God’s shining into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; With open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord; – Having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given to us; – Having the Spirit of God and of glory rest upon us; – A being called out of darkness into marvelous light; and having

the day-star arise in our hearts:’ – I say, if those things which have been mentioned do not answer these expressions, what else can we find out that does answer them? Those that do not think such things as these to be the fruits of the true Spirit, would do well to consider what kind of spirit they are waiting and praying for, and what sort of fruits they expect he should produce when he comes.⁴⁶

And on the more positive side, it was widely noted that as the Charismatic Movement swept through some of the mainline churches of the United States during the 1960s, something good (from an evangelical perspective) did take place. While it did sow seeds of severe discord in many congregations, not a few congregations passed from being almost totally nominal in their Christianity to a true faith that affirmed the reality of Christ as Lord and Saviour, as well as the truth of the Scriptures. Some of them successfully worked out their differences, while others split.

Any authentic survey of the work of the Holy Spirit will finally lead us to personal knowledge of Christ. Greater esteem for the Lord Jesus Christ is raised by such experiences. That is His supreme task, and as He carries it out, the Church comes into existence, and radiates the glory of God, from whose depths the Spirit proceeds.

1. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), pp. 182-183.

2. G. H. W. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit*, quoted in Bruce, op. cit., p. 183.

3. John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter VIII, 16 (p. 339).

4. F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 155.

5. J. A. Alexander, op. cit., p. 649.

6. Archibald T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Vol. IV: The Epistles of Paul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Sunday School Board, 1931), p. 171.

7. John Calvin, *Institutes*, III. I. 1.

8. John Calvin, *Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles*, 2:1-4 in *Calvini Opera* 48. p. 634.

9. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 20.

10. Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 162-63.

11. D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987), p. 105.

12. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 630-31.

13. Sam Storms suggests that the tongues speech in 1 Corinthians 12–14 is either an angelic dialect or a heavenly language (*The Language of Heaven* [Charisma House, Lake Mary, FL., 2019], p. 26).
14. Richard B. Gaffin, ‘A Cessationist View’ in Gundry and Grudem, eds., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today: 4 Views* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), pp. 30–41.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 34.
18. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
19. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 205
20. *Ibid.*
21. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (IVP Academic: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2013), p. 140.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
23. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
24. *Ibid.*
25. The famous seventeenth-century English Puritan, William Perkins, for example, wrote a textbook on preaching, under the title: *The Art of Prophesying*.
26. Carson, *op. cit.*, pp. 91, 92.
27. Kruger, *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 150.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
30. Brevard Childs, *New Testament as Canon* (London: SCM, 1984), 21. Cited in Kruger, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
31. Kruger, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
32. See Kruger, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–23, 28, 33, 47, 80, 117, 156, 205.
33. B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1983 reprint of 1918 original).
34. Richard Gaffin, ‘A Cessationist View’ in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, a symposium presenting an addition to Gaffin’s chapter on Cessationism, ‘An Open but Cautious View’ by Robert L. Saucy, ‘A Third Wave View’ by C. Samuel Storms, ‘A Pentecostal/Charismatic View’ by Douglas A. Oss, and ‘Concluding Statements’, edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Wayne A. Grudem (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996).
35. R. B. Gaffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 33.
36. Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (William B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985), p. 4.
37. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity, Third Edition* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York, 2011), pp. 79, 80.
38. W. A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988).
39. Calvin, *Institutes*, I. VII. 4 (Battles’ translation, p. 79).
40. Sam Storms, *The Language of Heaven* (Charisma House: Lake Mary, Florida, 2019), p. 14.
41. John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nelson Books: Nashville, Tennessee, 2013). The general position taken by MacArthur has been countered by Jack Deere in two books that are both exegetical and experiential: *Surprised by the*

Power of the Spirit, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, and *Why I Am Still Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2020.

42. MacArthur, op. cit., pp. 20, 22, 72, 135-36.

43. MacArthur, op. cit., pp. 109 ff.

44. MacArthur, op. cit., Chapter Eight (pp. 155-76).

45. MacArthur, op. cit., pp. 102-03.

46. Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 378.

PART TWO

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THE CHURCH

CHAPTER 5

THE HOLY SPIRIT: BOND OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The Holy Spirit brings us into vital union with Christ. That union is productive of what the New Testament calls fruit, spiritual gifts, and various spiritual blessings. This vital bond, the basis of all Christian experience, is maintained by the Holy Spirit, bonded by faith, and made effective in the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

God the Father Gives the Gift in Order to Unite Us to the Gift

The Gospel ('good news') is our greatest treasure, the most desirable reality we can grasp in the years of our earthly life, and our relationship to it determines where we shall spend eternity. A chief summary of the Gospel is found in John 3:16: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' To know this only begotten Son is to know God Himself, for Jesus told Philip: 'he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.' Yet as the crucifixion drew near, John makes clear that to know God is to be saved for evermore: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3).

To enable us to receive this inexpressibly wonderful gift of the Son, with eternal life in and through Him, the Father sends us from within Himself yet another equally divine gift, co-equal to Him and the Son: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to believers to bind them into everlasting union with the Son, and through Him, with the Father. That is to say, the chief work of the Holy Spirit upon the Church is to unite the elect to the Lord Jesus Christ, and, in so doing, causing all that the Son accomplished for His people to become theirs.

Three kinds of union

To say that we are united to another person is difficult for our Western thinking in our post-Enlightenment individualism, which is now extended even further in our current era of hypermodernity.¹ Here the individual becomes a world unto himself, often uprooted from any historical influences, torn from his personal, familial and cultural past, and taken up into a disembodied, self-created digital world where only a succession of present moments exist, each one isolated and disconnected from both the past and the future. So, particularly if we are in this hypermodern position, we generally think of ourselves as pure individuals, and in no sense as dwelling in someone else. But the plain teaching of Holy Scripture is that the most significant thing about us is ‘whose we are’. According to Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15 (cf. vv. 15-22; 45-50), what really defines who we are is whether we are ‘in Adam’ or ‘in Christ’. That is the most important fact that determines our identity.

The concept of being ‘in Adam’ describes uniting ourselves to the fallen structures of this passing age, ‘this present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4); having our personalities bound up in ‘the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience’ (Eph. 2:2). The spirit of man either opens himself up to the integrating influences of the life of the Word through the Spirit or, instead, gives himself over to the isolating, disintegrating darkness of the self-life pictured in this present evil age (Rom. 1:21-32; Gal. 5:19-21). The spiritual disciplines and the communal life in the Church can help us ‘prime’ our unconscious (a word used much in psychological literature) towards Christ and His kingdom. But when we move outside of these bounds, we open ourselves up to the powerful influences of this world, which will uproot our personalities from life in the eternal, living vine. Without such roots, we not only become subject to the turbulence of the fleeting vanities of this momentary existence (Eccles. 1:2, *Hevel*, as comprised in three of the other Hebrew words for vanity – *aven*, meaning nothingness, or *riyq/reyq*, meaning emptiness, etc.), but more terrifyingly, we open ourselves up to the other type of vanity, *shav*, meaning devastating ruin and desolation that ‘rushes over’ land or people (Ps. 35:8, Prov. 1:27, etc.) This destructive vanity that draws us out of union with Christ into the evanescence of the world, the flesh and the devil, leaves us controlled by passions and driven by the spiritual powers of darkness, which ‘prime’ or shape or conform our personalities (Rom. 12:1-2) towards disintegration.

To understand the importance of whose we are, or where we are – in Adam or in Christ – let us turn to the meaning of various ‘unions’ in Scripture. These were explicated by Dr John Dick of nineteenth-century Scotland. He spoke of ‘three great unions in Scripture’.² They are (1) the union of the Persons of the Trinity; (2) the personal union which subsists between the two natures of the Redeemer, and (3) the mystical union between Christ and His people.

He discusses this third (the mystical union) as follows:

... it would be a great mistake to suppose that there is no closer relation between Jesus Christ and his church than that which subsists between a king and his subjects The doctrine of Scripture is that he is the head not only of government but of influence; that the ties which connect him and his people are invisible and spiritual; and that the conjunction is so intimate, that he lives in them, and they live in him. The bonds of this union are the Spirit and faith ...³

Dick adds an all-important fact about why it is the Holy Spirit who is apt to this work:

The Spirit being in him and in them, makes them truly one. The distance between Christ who is in heaven, and believers who are upon earth, is no obstacle, because the Spirit is omnipresent. Through his intervention, not merely a figurative, but a real union is effected; there is one living principle in the head and the members; ‘He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit’ with him.⁴

According to the New Testament, the whole of the Christian life flows from our vital union with Christ. Much of Reformed Theology since the seventeenth century has sought to view the reality and progress of the Christian life (often following the points raised in Romans 8:28, 29) as ‘the order of salvation’ (*ordo salutis*). Without denying the catechetical usefulness of this way of organizing the experience of the members of the church, it is important to note that all of these components in the *ordo salutis* are all aspects of our union with Christ. For instance, following the great exegetical work of John Murray, it has been traditional to speak (in this order) of: effectual calling, regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.⁵

Although Murray actually places ‘union with Christ’ (in his preface) between ‘perseverance’ and ‘glorification,’⁶ he shows throughout his study that the various steps in this order are bringing us into union with Christ, and developing its potency within us, and I believe this insight is to be followed.

Thus we can identify several components to describe the creation and formation of our union: effectual calling ushers us into definite union with the One to whom we are called; regeneration supernaturally recreates us into the life of the One whose life becomes our life; faith and repentance are, in a sense, the first breathings of that new life, by which we look out from self to the One who stood in for us, and thus now have His righteousness imputed to us; justification declares us legally and morally freed from the guilt of the sin that condemned us, as we are seen by God in Christ who died for us and was raised for us, rather than in Adam; adoption means that by the Spirit we are given the spirit of a true child of God; sanctification means that we are, on the one hand, counted among the saints by what Jesus is to us, and on the other hand, that we are constantly being changed into the moral likeness of Him with whom we are united; perseverance means that we are held onto by God, and thereby enabled to hold onto Him to the end; and finally, glorification means that we shall be gloriously transformed into the image of Him who drew us to Himself, eternally freed from every blot and imperfection, so that we now shine ‘like the stars of the firmament’ with Christ’s reflected beauty!

The fruit of the Spirit

All of the defining benefits of our union with Christ are made real to us by the Holy Spirit, who collapses the bonds of space and time. He makes us present to Christ in heaven,⁷ and Christ present to us on earth,⁸ so that we are one. This oneness is illustrated in the teaching of Jesus in John 15 on the branches being in the vine. To be alive, the branches have to remain in the vine, and the very sap of their life flows into them as they are in the vine. The Apostle Paul similarly teaches that the Christian life is a certain reproduction of the life of Christ, by means of ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ in Galatians 5:22, 23 (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance). The Spirit dwelling in us makes us like the One who has brought us into union with Himself.

The concept of vital union of the branch in the vine, shows that the sap – the life-giving substance that brings forth the characteristics – comes not from self-power, but from the influence of that in which (or in whom) one is planted and abides, as we see in Galatians 5 and John ‘The sap’ is, in other words, the Holy Spirit, who brings within believers the influence of the Lord Jesus Christ, thereby transforming their lives. Here again we see the Gift giving the Gift.

Through the fruit of the Spirit, the very character of Christ is seen in us. That is, the communicable qualities of God Himself are reproduced in us.

Love is essential, for ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8);

joy, for God is the fountain of joy (Jesus faced the cross, ‘for the joy that was set before him’ [Heb. 12:2]; and was ‘anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows’ [Heb. 1:9]);

peace – the serenity of God: ‘For he is our peace, who hath made both one ...’ (Eph. 2:14); ‘And the peace of God; which passeth all understanding ...’ (Phil. 4:7); Christ Jesus.’

longsuffering: ‘And the LoRd passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LoRd, the LoRd God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth’ (Exod. 34:6);

goodness: ‘The good LoRd pardon every one’ (2 Chron. 30:18); ‘And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LoRd: because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel’ (Ezra 3:11); ‘Praise ye the LoRd, O give thanks unto the LoRd; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever’ (Ps. 106:1); the words of Jesus in Matthew 19:17: ‘And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God ...’;

faith: ‘Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ...’ (Heb. 12:2);

meekness – the words of Jesus: ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’ (Matt. 11:28-30);

temperance – or self-control: the God who does all things ‘decently and in order’ (1 Cor. 14:40), which His church is instructed to emulate, and ‘works all things by the counsel of his own will’ (Eph. 1:11), who from His calm and ordered character sees through everything in the right way and at the right time, in perfect control, within and without.

All of this is to say that the fruit of the Spirit is the manifestation of the character of God within His people.

This concept of God's character being developed in His people is explicated by John Murray in his *Principles of Conduct*. After having referred to Romans 6, 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; Ephesians 2:1-7; Colossians 3:1-4; and 1 Peter 4:1-4, he states: 'It is this abiding relationship to the death and resurrection of Christ, particularly, of course, to the latter, that constitutes the power, the dynamic, in virtue of which believers live the life of death to sin and of the newness of obedience. It is what we may call the virtue emanating from the death and resurrection of Christ, viewed as their death and resurrection also, that is the constant force in the sanctification of believers.'⁹

Again, we have to note that this corporate reality of union with Christ is more to be experienced than explained. Yet Holy Scripture does give us considerable insight into its reality. Adam, the first man, somehow included all his descendants, so that they sinned in him (except for Christ, who was virgin-born). God made His covenant with Noah and included all his family. 'Noah found grace in the eyes of the LoRd' (Gen. 6:8), but 'the covenant of the bow' also pertained to his family, so that God saw them in him. It was the same with Abraham; God made eternal promises to him and to his seed: 'And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee' (Gen. 17:7). The prophets pleaded this promise over many generations, and it was looked to in the New Testament (e.g. Gal. 4:22-31). Galatians 3:7 says: 'Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.' In the blessing of Abraham, God included his seed. This indicates a corporate nature of union between the Father of the faithful and those who follow Him in faith. We can thus say that our union to Adam is somewhat like our union to Christ, though far surpassed by it. Both are true unions, but the latter massively outweighs the former. For believers, the first union is temporal, while the second one is eternal.

The redeeming work of Christ caused Him to come into human flesh, so He could take that humanity down into death, and bring it up into new life. What He did was corporate in nature. This is set forth in Hebrews 2:8-18. Christ took on flesh (the seed of Abraham [Heb. 2:16]) in order that 'through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the

devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (Heb. 2:14-15). Sanctification is the great blessing spoken of here (v. 11). Humans, who will be saved, have to be 'all of one' (v. 11) in order to receive His sanctification and connected blessings. Mystical union with Him is essential to this goal (vv. 14-15). This union is not with the first Adam, but with the last Adam. The first union is by birth into a fallen race, the second union is by rebirth into a resurrection humanity.

Galatians 4:4-5 also shows the necessity of union of the eternal Son with human nature to make that nature obedient to God. Calvin writes: 'Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called "our Head" (Eph. 4:15), and "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). We also, in turn, are said to be "engrafted into him" (Rom. 11:17), and to "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27); for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.'

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All spiritual blessings

Let us look at other aspects of the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer. That is, our mystical union with Christ in the Holy Spirit is the fount of the qualities of the Christian life. Ephesians 1:3-14 discusses how our union with Christ is the source of 'all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ' (v. 3). These blessings, although housed in Christ who is in heaven, are available to us now. They include holiness (v. 4), adoption (v. 5), redemption and forgiveness (v. 7), all wisdom and prudence (v. 8), inheritance (v. 11), all of which spiritual blessings the Holy Spirit seals in the life of a believer (v. 13). Throughout this passage, it is through this relationship of union with Christ that these spiritual blessings come to us. These verses speak extensively of our being 'in him' and 'in Christ'; that corporate union is the fount of every blessing of the Christian life.

Romans 8:28-30 shows that our being in Christ is working to the grand goal of our being made like Him, through the context of the good and ill that comes into our lives here below. The final result is that we shall be made like Christ, the Son of God (v. 29). The terrible things that can happen to us in this world (vv. 35-39) can never separate us from Him, who by that union makes us 'more than conquerors' (v. 37). The result of 'all things

working together for good' (v. 28) is that we shall be like Him. That is the great good God has in store for His people, and it comes through their union with His Son.

Spiritual gifts

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, also blesses His people with 'spiritual gifts' so that they may minister to the larger body of Christ – the Church. While the fruit of the Spirit is for absolutely every Christian, as we have seen, and involves, in varying measures of fulness, the same qualities from the character of God (cf. Gal. 5:22, 23), the particular gifts of the Spirit are granted to some Christians, and not to others. Not everyone has all of them. God sovereignly determines who shall have which one.

It is important to note that whatever gifts may be given to one person, and withheld from another, all spiritual gifts are intended to minister to the whole body of Christ, to the Church at large. Their purpose is not primarily focused on the believer through whom they are given, but on the people of God. This larger purpose is what we see in Ephesians 4:8-13, where the fullness of Christ's work of uniting Heaven and Earth is given to the Church:

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ...

Interestingly, there is no totally inclusive list of these gifts in the New Testament, but various gifts are found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 and verse 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Peter 4:11. In 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 is found the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing and miracle working, prophecy and discernment of spirits, speaking and interpreting in tongues. In 1 Corinthians 12:28: apostles, prophets,

teachers, workers of miracles, gifts of healing and of helps, gifts of administration and of tongues. In Romans 12:6-8, we find: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy. In Ephesians 4:11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. In 1 Peter 4:11: speaking and serving: “ If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability with God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

All in all, the gifts magnify and make apprehensible the love of God in Christ, our Creator and Redeemer. The gifts do not magnify the individual who receives them, but rather, they honor the Lord who gave them, and minister to the whole body, not primarily the individual.

Apostles and prophets seem central to all the listing of these diverse gifts, for they properly interpret the meaning of all the other gifts, as intended to edify the whole church. As we have previously noted, one of the major functions of miracles was to accredit those who spoke (and later wrote) the words of the New Testament as fully inspired. It is difficult to distinguish the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom (presumably an explication of what God meant when He spoke), and both healings and helps strengthen the body of the church, while leadership and administration cause it to function in orderly and fruitful fashion. Giving is clear enough and reflects the love of the Father who gave His only-begotten Son. All in all, the gifts magnify and make apprehensible the love of God in Christ, our Creator and Redeemer. The gifts do not magnify the individual who receives them, but rather, they honor the Lord who gave them, and minister to the whole body, not primarily the individual.

Then John 17:6-26 sets forth four spiritual blessings that come from the saints' union with their Lord: glory, eternal life, knowledge of God, and sanctification. These four blessings come through 'knowing Christ'; that is, through true spiritual union with Him. Thus, in this high priestly prayer, Christ prays for our oneness with Him, and with one another (vv. 21, 23). There is a parallel in all of these passages: Ephesians 1:3-14 speaks of spiritual blessings, which are much the same as being shaped into His image in Romans 8:28-30, and these are parallel to the four spiritual blessings listed in John 17. All of them flow from our union to Christ.

As we have already seen, this concept of union with another is central to all that Scripture teaches about who we are. Romans 5:12-21 gives us the

federal headship principle. That is, we are implicated in Adam's sin: when he fell, we also fell, because we were counted in him and so that is the source of physical death (vv. 12-14). It is in that sense that all humanity is 'in Adam'. Jesus Himself revealed how this death operates in us. If we refuse to believe, and choose to remain outside of life in Him – the true light (John 8:12) and the great I AM (John 8:24a) – he declares not once, but three times, that we shall 'die in [our] sins' (John 8:21, 24b). Physical death begun in Adam works spiritual death in us.

But the good news is that by faith, we are taken out of Adam and engrafted into Christ, the Last Adam. Now our identity has changed for time and eternity. Just as there was an organic, federal connection between Adam and his descendants, there is also an organic, federal connection between Christ and His people. Death resulted from the original connection with Adam, while righteousness and life result from the faith connection with the Last Adam.

The Organic Connection

Paul summarizes this organic connection in 1 Corinthians 15:20-22: 'But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' The destiny of unbelievers is determined by their corporate connection to the First Adam (death), whereas the destiny of believers is determined by their connection to the Last Adam (life).

In his *Commentary on John* (17:19), Calvin discusses the significance of the Old Testament image of 'firstfruits', as used here by Jesus: 'And for their sakes I sanctify myself.'

By these words [Jesus] explains more clearly from what source that sanctification flows, which is completed in us by the doctrine of the Gospel. It is because he consecrated himself to the Father, that his holiness might come to us; for as the blessing on the firstfruits is spread over the whole harvest, so the Spirit of God cleanses us by the holiness of Christ, and makes us partakers of it...He is likewise said to have been *made to us sanctification*, (1 Cor. 1:30), because he has, so to speak, presented us to his Father in his own person, that we may be renewed to true holiness by his Spirit.

The key is given here in terms of the Holy Spirit. He united us to Christ by faith, and continually keeps us ‘in the vine’, so that we are part in all that Christ, the firstfruits, does in our place, including presenting us to His Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit maintains us in the one body of the church with Christ, who is our head, so that every benefit of His person and work is made over to us as appropriate, not least being made present to the heavenly Father.

To appreciate what our union with Christ in the Holy Spirit is, we must at the same time be aware of what it is not. First, it is not, as Calvin pointed out, ‘a gross mixture of Christ and ourselves.’ It is a spiritual union, and that in no sense makes it less real than if it were a physical union. Calvin writes: ‘... I reject their teaching of the mixture, or transfusion, of Christ’s flesh with the soul. For it is enough for us that, from the substance of his flesh Christ breathes life into our souls – indeed, pours forth his very life into us.’¹¹ To clarify the channel of this life, Calvin quotes Augustine: ‘... Augustine shows that he pours down his grace from heaven through the Spirit upon us.’¹²

Second, according to Calvin, ‘Christ’s secret union with the devout is by nature incomprehensible ...’¹³ But the human mind does not constitute the limits of who God is and how He works. As was said earlier, it is something we experience, rather than explain. Yet its bonds are revealed in Scripture. Three remarks need to be made about them.

First, the bond between the Lord and the believer is maintained by the Holy Spirit. Ronald S. Wallace paraphrases Calvin: ‘It is therefore the Holy Spirit alone who can effect this union, for it is the Holy Spirit alone who can so join things in heaven and things on earth that heavenly things can be grasped by human minds and that the life and virtue of what is in heaven can be shared by those who are yet on earth. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can bring into real being that wonderful relation of mystery between Christ’s heavenly body and his church on earth which is so clearly depicted in the act of participation in the Lord’s Supper and Baptism.’¹⁴

Second, it is bonded by faith. ‘Faith enables us to partake of the life made available through the death of Christ. But all this is possible only because faith actually unites us to Christ and inserts us into his body, creating the bond that enables us to receive, possess and enjoy Christ

himself – for the blessings which are his gifts cannot be received and enjoyed by us apart from communion with himself by faith.’¹⁵

‘Faith is thus an entirely supernatural gift – a new capacity created within man whereby what is in heaven is really possessed and enjoyed by him. It effects such a secret and wonderful communion with Christ that even though Jesus Christ remains entire in heaven he is nevertheless grasped so firmly and possessed so completely that he may be said actually to dwell in our hearts. Faith has the power to reach through the humanity of Jesus even to God himself faith is able to rise from the flesh of Christ to his divinity, and is able to penetrate above all the heavens, even to those mysteries which the angels behold and adore.’¹⁶

For example, Acts 14 gives a summary of what God had been doing among the Gentiles under the ministry of Paul and Barnabas: ‘... and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles ...’ (v. 27). In Acts 16:14 we are told of the first person converted in Europe, who was a Jewish merchant woman, Lydia: ‘whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.’ The opening of the lives of the Gentiles under Paul and Barnabas, and the opening of the heart of Lydia were wonders of the grace of God. As was said of Apollos at Ephesus and then in Achaia: ‘who when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace’ (Acts 18:24-27). The very next verse (v. 28) demonstrates that this divine grace worked through the preaching about Christ from the scriptures: ‘For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.’

Third, it is made effective in the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. As Wallace states:

It is extremely difficult even for believers to grasp its meaning and reality. Therefore God appoints the two sacraments chiefly in order to depict visibly this particular mystery so that by their use we may come to know and understand better the nature of our union with Christ.

As this mystery of the secret union of Christ with believers is incomprehensible by nature, he exhibits its figure and image in visible signs adapted to our capacity, nay, by giving, as it were, earnest and badges. He makes it certain to us as if it were seen by the eye ... the familiarity of the similitude giving it access to minds however dull and showing that souls are fed by

Christ, just as the corporeal life is sustained by bread and wine. Both the preaching of the Gospel and the use of the sacraments was appointed. Calvin, in speaking in the *Institutes* of the importance of this doctrine for the Christian life, points out that ‘this same doctrine is clearly seen in the sacraments ...’ The sacrament, for Calvin, is ‘a looking-glass in which we may see that God not only dwelleth among us...but that he attests his good will and love toward us more expressly than by word.’¹⁷

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1. See, for example: John Armitage, *From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond Theory, Culture & Society* (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, 1999), Vol. 16 (5-6): pp. 25-55.
 2. John Dick, *Lectures on Theology in Two Volumes* (Philadelphia: F. W. Greenough, 1838), vol. II, p. 166.
 3. Ibid., pp. 166, 167.
 4. Ibid., p. 167.
 5. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980).
 6. Ibid., p. 7.
 7. Christ is the vine and His people are the branches. ‘Fruit’ (used in the singular, though referring to a whole range of beautiful qualities) is likewise produced from some other power than ourselves, namely, from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Root, the Source, in whom we vitally abide.
 8. E.g. Ephesians 2:6: ‘And hath raised us up together, and made us sit in heavenly places in 8. E.g. Colossians 1:27: ‘To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.’
 9. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 207.
 10. Calvin, *Institutes*, III. I. 1.
 11. Calvin, op. cit., IV. XVII, p. 32.
 12. Ibid., IV. XVII, p. 28.
 13. Ibid., IV. XVII, p. 1.
 14. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), p. 20.
 15. Ibid., p. 21.
 16. Ibid., p. 22.
 17. Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

OUR UNION WITH CHRIST – AS UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Union of God's people with Christ was prepared for in the Old Testament, and in the ministry initiated by the incarnate Christ was made real for believers as God called them into the supernatural changes of a regenerate existence, including a repentant rethinking of their preconceptions, and in it, a living out of the personal truth as it is in Jesus. God turns them to Himself, so that they desire from within to restructure their old lives on the basis of who He is. Their repentant love and gratitude are part of the restructuring of their entire lives from a center in self to a center in the living God. In true faith, they now see most vividly God, self, and spiritual reality, with the keenest practical changes ensuing. Thereby they share, to the degree that saved humans can, in the inner-Trinitarian life and love of God. This keeps them always turning back to Him in new acts of faith and repentance, for He is the life of their life. The will, the affections, and the conscience are renewed by the Holy Spirit within them, with a sort of 'gestalt switch' taking place, in which they now see everything differently. They have realized the love of God, and things cannot remain the same.

Holy Scripture, and all that it contains, is given in order that God may be our God, and we may be His people. Above all else, it testifies that the happiest and most supreme reality we can ever experience is union with the Lord Jesus Christ. In and through Jesus we enter into this supreme reality, as we see in Galatians 4:4, 5: 'But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.' And Jesus pours out the Spirit into our personalities, who then writes these scriptural truths in our hearts, as we see in Galatians 4:6: 'And because ye

are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.'

The way for God pouring Himself into the lives of His people was prepared long before the New Testament. Jeremiah 31:33-34 sets it forth:

Behold, the days come, saith the LoRd, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LoRd: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LoRd, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LoRd; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LoRd: for I will remember their sin no more.

Ezekiel foresaw much the same:

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:19-20);

And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall no more be divided into two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all....Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Ezek. 37:22; 26-27).

What Ezekiel says is followed by the Epistle to the Hebrews, which draws upon Psalm 40, in showing how the incarnation of Christ provides our sanctification:

Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and

sacrifices for sin thou hast no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:5-10).

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:3: 'Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.'

Saint Irenaeus of Lyon described Christ as having passed through all ages of mankind in order to sanctify every part of their existence. He wrote:

Being a master, therefore, he also possessed the age of a master, not despising or evading any condition of humanity, nor setting aside in himself that law, which he had appointed for the human race, but sanctifying every age, by that period corresponding to it which belonged to himself – all, I say, who through him are born again to God – infants, and children, and boys and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise he was an old man for old men, that he might be a perfect master for all, not merely as regards setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise ...¹

When we are united to Christ through faith and the Holy Spirit, through Him we enter into the supreme reality, for Christ pours out the Spirit into our persons, who then writes these scriptural truths in our hearts. We cannot always tell what comes first in our order of experience (although generally we would say, justification and then sanctification), but the main point is that out of our union with Christ, all the blessings of the Christian life flow, because now we are in Him.

We cannot therefore make strictly temporal distinctions between the various phases (or steps) involved in the believer's union with Christ.

But they are all part of the same reality. Yet a careful look at the New Testament will indicate the joint reality of our union with Christ in and through the Holy Spirit. We may begin with:

Calling

In the New Testament, ‘calling’ can be used in different contexts, as in one’s life work (1 Cor. 7:20-24), and office in the church (Rom. 1:1), and the gospel appeal to repentance (Matt. 22:14). However, in the matter of union with Christ, it refers to what is termed traditionally ‘effectual calling’, and is rooted in predestination, and through union with Christ, finally leads to glorification. ‘Effectual’ means that it achieves its intended purpose to gather in the elect, as opposed to the general call that goes out to all who hear it; some of them respond, and some do not.

Some who hear the Gospel call reject it, as in Mark 16:15, 16, which teaches that he who does not believe shall be damned. Christ’s parable of the marriage feast shows that some who were invited did not come, ‘For many are called, but few are chosen’ (Matt. 22:2-14). Though invited to the feast by the king himself, speaking by the Spirit through the preaching of the Word, yet they reject it to their own condemnation (Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:18). Jesus even goes so far as to say that not only is the Word offered to them, but many are even drawn into the dragnet of the kingdom of heaven, who are later revealed to be truly corrupt (*sapra*) and evil (*ponerous*), and are finally ‘separated from the just’ and ‘cast away’ (*exobalon*) into eternal darkness (Matt. 13:47-50).

Jesus’ warning in Luke 8:18 should be taken to heart here: ‘Take heed therefore how ye hear, for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.’ These words heighten the call to personal holiness. They require an actual living out of the holy way of God. Simply affirming it in words, but not with the life, is insufficient for a true believer, as Jesus says in Matthew 7:24-27:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened to a

foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Jesus says in Luke 11:28: 'Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.' He specifies the kinds of things this keeping involves in the words pronounced on the last great day before an assembled universe in Matthew 25:34-36: 'Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.'

Paul describes this as an internal drive for holiness, in which the true members of the church yield their members as servants of righteousness unto holiness (Rom. 6:19). Hence, practical holiness is the outworking of effectual calling, which impacts both inner motivations and external activities of life. Predestination is behind this calling, which constitutes a renewing work of the Spirit, that is as radical as the coming together of dry bones, which are then clothed with flesh, and filled with the breath of life.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 represents, in terms of the covenant people Israel, this effectual calling in graphic form, where the prophet was shown by the Lord the people of God in a valley of dry bones. God asked him: 'Son of man, can these dry bones live? And I answered. O LoRd God, thou knowest' (v. 3). Then the Lord commanded him to prophesy over the dry bones. After he did so, the Lord clothed the dead bones in flesh (v. 6) and told Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind to breath upon the still lifeless bodies. 'So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army' (v. 10). Then the Lord applies this to the current spiritual deadness of Israel (vv. 12-14). And it still applies to wherever the Word is preached in the power of the Spirit of God. It is an effectual call indeed. It was effective in the conversion of Lydia in Acts 16:14, for we are told that God opened her heart, as the first convert in Europe.

We are told the same about Paul. Galatians 1:15 says about Paul: 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace ...' And Paul shows that it applies to all believers: 'God is

faithful, by whom ye were called ...' (1 Cor. 1:9); and 2 Timothy 1:8, 9: 'Be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God, who saved us, and called us with a holy calling.'

This is a once-for-all divine act, rather than a process: 'called saints' (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). However, we spend all our lives knowing the fulness of it. Similarly, 1 Peter 2:9 states that we are called out of darkness into His marvelous light. The God who called us, will see it through to the end: 'Faithful is he who called you, who also will do it' (1 Thess. 5:24), and the immediately previous verse assures us: 'And the very God of peace, sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:23).

Regeneration

God works in us so that we can respond to His call. First, we must consider the context which explains the all-encompassing nature of his work within us. And that is total depravity, which means that sin has corrupted all parts of our being. To follow the traditional delineation of this depravity, we note that sin has polluted the fountain of mind, will and emotions that make us who we are as fallen humans. 'Total' does not mean that we are as bad as could be, but rather that every faculty of our being is affected negatively.

Ephesians 2:1 shows that mankind is 'dead in sins and trespasses'. Death, in this context, does not imply cessation of all activity, but rather alienation from God, so that we are active in ways not pleasing to Him. Paul says elsewhere that 'the carnal mind is not pleasing to God' (Rom. 8:7). That is to say that the mind of the fallen person, before regeneration, is not neutral; it is opposed to God's holy will. Romans 1:18 shows that the fallen person 'holds down the truth in unrighteousness'. (*Katechonton* can mean 'hold', but in this instance almost certainly means 'hold down' or 'suppress'.)

This indicates that the unregenerate mind has a great deal of information concerning God and the moral life, but willingly avoids submitting to it, as we see in Romans 1:25-31:

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did

change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

The very next verse (2:1) summarizes the results of living according to a mind that claims to be neutral, but ‘holds down’ the truth of God: ‘Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.’

The mind is darkened, so that it does want to come to the light. The will is alienated from God, so that it refuses to honor Him by submitting to His call. The emotions are disordered; they desire things that are evil and harmful instead of what is beautiful and healthy. Thomas Boston writes:

The *affections* are corrupted. The unrenewed man’s affections are wholly disordered and distempered; they are as an unruly horse, that either will not receive, or violently runs away with the rider. So man’s heart is a mother of abominations (Mark 7:21, 22), ‘For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness.’ Thenaturalman’s affectionsarewretchedlymisplaced....His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth; his heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set on (Acts 9:5) Now here is a threefold cord against heaven and holiness, not easily to be broken; a blind mind, a perverse will, and disorderly affections.²

These qualities of man’s faculties must be profoundly changed for him to respond to the call. Thomas Boston describes this supernatural change:

A change of qualities or dispositions; it is not a change of the substance, but of the qualities of the soul. Vicious qualities are removed, and the contrary dispositions are brought in, in their stead. 'The old man is put off' (Eph. 4:22); 'the new man is put on' (v. 24). Man lost none of the rational faculties of his soul by sin: he had an understanding still, but it was darkened; he had still a will, but it was contrary to the will of God. So in regeneration, there is not a new substance created, but new qualities are infused; light instead of darkness, righteousness instead of unrighteousness.³

In sum, it is essential that the fallen man's nature be supernaturally changed from within. That is because of what 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' This pinpoints the Holy Spirit as the only One who can come inside us and make this supernatural change. The Holy Spirit as God's gift is able to open us up to receive the saving gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since man cannot change himself in this radical death-to-life way, God the Father must do it, and He does it through the Holy Spirit. Man's whole being: mind, will, and emotions (denoted in the biblical term 'heart') must be renewed. It is predicted in Ezekiel 36:26, 'A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.'

Christ describes this miracle in John 3:3-8:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again, The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

The concept of the new birth clearly indicates that God the Father has to bring to the birth; humans are the objects of this activity, not the subjects. In John 3:3, Nicodemus is told that 'Ye must be born again ...' The Greek term is *anōthen* and can be translated 'anew' (or 'again'); it could also be rendered 'from above'. The only place in the New Testament where it means 'again' is Galatians 4:29. Much more often it means 'from above', as in Matthew 27:51, Mark 15:38, John 3:31, John 19:11, James 3:15. In Luke 1:3 and Acts 26:5 it means 'from the beginning'. If we translate it as 'from above', it means that the Holy Spirit from heaven is the begetter of life, and if we translate it as 'again', it means that a supernatural event must be wrought within us to make us enter the kingdom of God.

The phrase 'except one be born of water and of Spirit' is a parallel expression (or epexegetical) to 'born again' or 'from above'. The reference to 'born of Spirit' is clear from the immediate context, but 'born of water' has caused much discussion and disagreement among interpreters. Some have long maintained that it means baptism. That is possible, but not very likely, because the text could have plainly said baptism if that were what it meant. Also, Christian baptism had not yet been instituted when Christ spoke these words. People were already entering the kingdom when Christian baptism was appointed. Moreover, it is not likely that Christ would have expected Nicodemus to have understood a rite that had not yet been instituted. Thus, '*born of water*' should be a reference to the religious usage of water that Nicodemus would have comprehended.

Generally, in the Old Testament, in the religious sphere, 'water' signified washing and purification from the pollution of sin. It carries a message of cleansing, as we see in Psalm 51:2, 3; Isaiah 1:16; Jeremiah 33:8; Ezekiel 36:25, and Zechariah 13:1. As Jesus applies this to the great Jewish religious leader of His time, Nicodemus, it plainly indicated that the Pharisees, as well as all others, needed spiritual purification from the defilement of sin in order to enter the kingdom of God. As it says in Ezekiel 36:25, an operative phrase is 'then I shall sprinkle clear water upon you, and ye shall be clean'. So, taken together, 'Spirit' indicates supernatural renewal of life, and 'water' indicates the cleansing from sin, or purification that accompanies it.

In John 3:6, Jesus says: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' As in John 6:63 and 8:15, 'flesh' carries the ethical element of *sarx*, that is, human nature under the control

of sin cannot overcome its natural condition. ‘Spirit’ refers to the control of the Spirit over human nature. It is by the generation of the Spirit that such dominance is brought about.

As John Murray suggests, Jesus’ comparison in John 3:8, of the wind blowing where it wants to, and our hearing its sound, but not knowing where it comes from or where it is going to, and the new birth carries several implications: the invisibility and mysteriousness of the Spirit’s operation; the irresistibility of the new birth (i.e. we cannot control it any more than we can control the wind); the sovereignty of the Spirit – ‘where it wills’, and the certainty of observable fruit (‘thou hearest the sound thereof’). In sum, the Holy Spirit brings birth to the believer in secret fashion, and this new birth is made manifest in fruits which are in accordance with the characteristics of the family into which he/she is born.⁴

This accords with what John says (in John 1:12,13), namely, that sonship comes from a right given by God. By this means, we become *tekna theou* (‘born ones’ of God). Hence we experience the communication of life from God. This kind of generation is not by natural procreation; it is not ‘the will of the flesh’, nor the will of the male, but it is caused directly by God Himself; He brings us to the birth.

In his first Epistle, John indicates that the Christian overcomes the world through the divine begetting (1 John 2:29; 4:7; 5:1; and 5:18). That is, doing righteousness, not sinning, loving the brethren, loving God; believing that Jesus is the Christ, and willing subjection to the commandments come from the new birth. In other words, regeneration brings about the renewal of the image of God in us.

The Apostle Paul conveys the same message in various passages. As we have noted, he teaches that we were raised by regeneration from our spiritual deadness:

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1-3).

Paul shows that the grace of God is the source of regeneration, not human self-help efforts: 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost' (Titus 3:5).

In Ephesians 2:4-10, he states this truth even more fully:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Paul teaches that it is the Holy Spirit who brings us to this spiritual rebirth: 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death' (Rom. 8:2). In 1 Corinthians 15:45, he shows how infinitely greater it is to be in union with the Last Adam than with the First Adam: 'And so it is written, the first man, Adam, was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.'

Robert Rollock, first principal of Edinburgh University (sixteenth century), described two elements in effectual calling:

In this first grace of God, which we call a new creation of divine qualities in the soul, man standeth mere passively before God, and as the material cause of God's work. For in this first renewing of the soul of man, what divine virtues hath man to work with God's Spirit, or to help the work of grace? Yet we say not that man in this new birth is no more than a trunk or dead tree: for that there is in man (that so I may speak) a passive power to receive that divine grace and life of God, as also the use of reason, which dead trees have not In this second grace, which is the action or work of faith, we stand not as mere passively; but being moved by the Holy Ghost, we work ourselves; as being stirred up to believe, we believe; and in a word, we work with God's Spirit working in us.⁵

Conversion

Conversion is one of the first results of regeneration. The new-born nature has an inherent hatred of sin, a desire to turn from it, and move in a Godward direction. In regeneration the person is passive; in conversion he/she is active.

We must look at the concept of conversion, first in the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the idea of conversion is found in two forms: cultic (or ritual), and prophetic.

Cultic (or ritual)

In times of emergency and distress, the people of Israel made efforts to express repentance, in hopes of removing the divine wrath. This is seen in passages found over several different centuries. In Solomon's dedicatory prayer in the Temple, he beseeches the Lord: '... if they turn to thee again, and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication to thee in this house, then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel (1 Kings 8:33).

During the captivity of much of Israel in the Medo-Persian Empire, Queen Esther instructed her uncle to call the Jews to repentance in hopes of averting a total pogrom of her people, in Esther 4:16: 'Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go into the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish.'

Later, the prophet Joel called for deep signs of repentance in a corrupt Israel: 'Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God, for the grain offering and the libation are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast ...'

(1) There were public forms of repentance, such as the wearing of sackcloth and ashes, as we see in Esther 4:16 (above); 1 Kings 21:27; Isaiah 58:5; Jonah 3:6 and 8 (in this case, not Israelites, but the pagan Ninevites who repented at the preaching of Jonah); Nehemiah 9:1; Daniel 9:3.

(2) There were worship services, as in 1 Samuel 7:6; Isaiah 63:7; Nehemiah 9:1, 2; and Daniel 9:3.

Prophetic calls to repentance

Often the prophets criticized superficial forms of religion in which the lives of the people were not right with God, although they maintained a nominal profession of godliness. Hosea dealt with this hypocritical nominalism (Hosea 6:4, 6), as did at a later time Isaiah (Isa. 1–2; 58:5–7) and Joel (Joel 2:13).

Although the prophets declared that God rejected the meaningless ritual of their liturgy, when it was not accompanied by obedient lives, it did not mean that He did not still require true worship practices, in accordance with His revealed will. He says through Hosea: ‘For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings’ (Hosea 6:6, which is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 9:13). For sacrifice to be valid in God’s eyes, it must be accompanied by mercy to other humans.

Since Christian truth is truth in the form of personal being in Jesus Christ, then knowing the truth must involve a relation in being to it as well as a relation in cognition. Thus, corresponding to the oneness of truth and being in Christ, there must be a oneness of knowing and becoming on the part of the believer. Knowing the truth and being recreated in truth are inseparable. As Christ said to Nicodemus, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ In no other sphere of knowledge does knowledge of truth affect so decisively the being of the knower, but here, knowledge of the truth involves a radical change in being, or a conversion. In some respects this also can be looked on as a Christian adaptation of the general scientific principle that rational knowledge of an object requires adaptation of behaviour in accordance with its nature. Because in Christ truth and being are one, adaptation to such truth on the part of the knower requires of him in the very act of knowing a radical reorientation in which knowing and being mutually involve one another. In the language used at an earlier point, this will involve a reconciliation between idea and image, of truth and action, and a renunciation of the radical dichotomy between a realm of ideas and a realm of events. Reconciliation with the truth must be allowed to penetrate throughout the whole life and being of the believer, so that reconciliation becomes an internal truth of his own being and mind. It is only out of the wholeness of person and being that true knowing of the truth can be actualized.

In sum, it is essential that the fallen man’s nature be supernaturally changed from within. That is because of what 1 Corinthians 2:14 says: ‘But

the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ This pinpoints the Holy Spirit as the only One who can come inside us and make this supernatural change. The Holy Spirit as God’s gift is able to open us up to receive the saving gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hence while this profound internal change involves intellectual assent, it is a ‘repentant rethinking and structural recasting of all our preconceptions’.⁶ Elsewhere, Torrance says: ‘It belongs thus to the refinement of scientific activity to discern the nature of what is being investigated, to adapt not only our questions but our mode of questioning to its nature, and at every point to let ourselves, with our preconceptions, be called into question that we may really know what is there as it ought to be known.’⁷

Repentance in the Old Testament

The Hebrew verb often employed for repentance is *shub* and it means a turning back from sin in the direction of God. Hence, *shub* and related words show that sin is against the Person of God, for one is called to come back to Him. This is perhaps seen most clearly in David’s confession in Psalm 51:4: ‘Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightiest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.’ His sin was against Bathsheba and Uriah, but ultimately it was against God Himself. This is a profoundly personal view of sin and repentance. This personal view of *shub* is seen at large in chapters 1 to 3 of Hosea; Isaiah 1:2; and Jeremiah 1:16; 2:13, 17, 19. To willfully forsake God is disastrous in its consequences, and deepest repentance is called for.

Hosea 2:9 calls for a turning back to God. This coming back to God after apostasy is like a marriage relationship, as we see at large in Hosea. As Hosea welcomed back a sinful, immoral wife, so God will welcome back his people into this holy state of matrimony. Coming back to God in true repentance involves at its heart a new trust in the Lord, as in Hosea 3:5 and Jeremiah 3:22, 23.

This trust includes a turning from things that are by their nature ungodly, whether thoughts or actions in order to return to God. ‘In Am. Hosea and Is. *Shub* is always used with the prep. *el* and *ad* [obj. always Yahweh] or in the abs., and this again shows how strongly they regard penitence as a converting or returning to Yahweh ...’⁸

Two key verses are found in Ezekiel. Ezekiel 14:6: ‘Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.’ And then Ezekiel 33:11: ‘Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way, and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?’

Man in the creation narrative is ‘formed out of the dust’ and becomes ‘a living soul’ only when the Spirit of God breathes into him. When, however, man’s sin cuts him off from God’s Spirit, his life disintegrates into vanity as he ‘returns’ (*shub*) to dust (Gen. 3:19). *Shub* literally means ‘to return’, and this reveals the tension of our existence after the Fall. We are created out of the dust and return to it, unless we *turn* unto the Lord, who is the only One who can ‘breathe’ into us the breath of life, transforming our bodies of dust; our dead, dry bones into living souls (cf. Gen. 2:7 and Ezek. 37:4-6).

Genesis 3:19 says: ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (*shub*).’ The call to return is issued frequently in the Old Testament. Joel 2:12-17 calls to repentance in light of impending destruction. Outward signs of penitence, such as fasting and weeping (v. 13), are not sufficient. One is to rend one’s heart, not one’s garments (v. 13). This repentance is encouraged by the fact that the God to whom they turn is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness. He repents of the threatened evil.

Psalms 80 shows that we can only return to the Lord when He Himself turns to us. This Psalm contains a refrain: ‘Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved’ (v. 3). This refrain is repeated in verses 7 and 19. Verse 14 prays that for all this to occur, God Himself must ‘return’ (*shub*) to us. Psalm 85 shows that God’s ‘turning’ us away from all that would destroy enables us to come back to Him, and this becomes our entrance to salvation. Yet the Psalmist moves further, combining *chayah* with *shub*, as if to say that our life is continually bound up with this continual act of ‘turning’ to the God of our salvation.

Repentance in the New Testament

In the New Testament, *shub* generally is rendered as *metanoeo*. It is used 34 times in the New Testament, and it means to change the entire framework of

the inner reasoning of the mind away from self towards Christ and His kingdom. In sum, *metanoeo* is presented in the Gospels as the dividing line between the coming of God's eternal kingdom here and now with our new creational life in it through Jesus, on the one hand, and our eternal judgment, on the other, if we reject the continual call of Christ to hear and believe. It also identifies the false repentance built, not upon Jesus, but on human calculation.

The first occurrence of it in the New Testament comes with John the Baptist 'preaching in the wilderness, saying Repent ye (*metanoete*), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 3:2). When Jesus returns from the testing in the wilderness, He proclaims the exact same words (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). And following the discourse on John the Baptist, Christ then began to 'upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not' (Matt. 11:20-21; Luke 10:13). He later declared that even 'the men of Nineveh' should 'rise in judgment with this generation, and condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, a greater than Jonah is here' (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32).

As Jesus sent out the twelve with no possessions, but with 'power over unclean spirits', the text says that 'they went out, and preached that men should repent (*metanoousin*). And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them' (Mark 6:12-13). Following Pilate's murder of the Galileans whose blood he had 'mingled with sacrifices', and then with the events of the eighteen killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam, Jesus offered repeated warnings to the people, 'unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:3 and 5).

It is with this focus on the necessity of our repentance in relation to the coming judgment that Jesus gives the parable of the barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). This tree was found throughout Palestine and had become a symbol in the Old Testament to convey the idea of covenantal flourishing, on the one hand (cf. Jer. 24:4-7; Num. 13:23; Deut. 8:8), or covenantal cursing and judgment on the other (cf. Jer. 24:8-10; 5:17; 8:13; 29:17; Isa. 34:4; Hosea 2:12; 9:10; Ps. 105:33).

It is in relation to the latter that we see the way Jesus uses it here and elsewhere (cf. Matt. 21:19). Though Israel had been given the Law and the Prophets; though the Lord had indeed planted them in the garden of the Promised Land with all they needed to flourish, they had generation by generation refused to hear and obey. Thus they called down judgment upon

themselves, so that their fig tree withered (cf. Joel 1:12; Amos 4:9; Luke 13:7). Jesus, like Moses and the Prophets in earlier times, now gives them an opportunity to hear again the transforming Word of the Lord unto life (Ps. 1:2-3; Luke 13:8). If they will not hear this, then they will be 'cut down' (Jer. 12:17; Luke 13:9), for their tree will be shown to be a truly barren one, with total inability to take up the nutrients of the soil to bear fruit (Luke 13:7).

In face of the final judgment, the dividing line is our response to the words of Jesus. Luke 15 shows the wrong response of the Pharisees and scribes, who are murmuring against Jesus (Luke 15:1), while on the other hand, publicans and sinners are drawing near to hear Him. In that context, Jesus declares the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, with the words: 'I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth' (Luke 15:7, 10).

Next, it appears in the warnings given at the close of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man in the torments of hell, begs Abraham to send Lazarus to 'dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue.' When that is denied, he then begs him to send him to his five brothers, declaring 'if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent' (Luke 16:30). This is the first instance where *metanoia* is understood in terms of the fallen thinking of this world. Abraham replies: 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead' (Luke 16:31). We might add that Jesus' words are indeed confirmed when another Lazarus arises from the dead (John 11:1-44), and the Pharisees take no steps towards *metanoia*, but rather 'took counsel to put him to death' (John 11:46-48; 53).

The two final instances in the Gospels continue the warnings of the coming judgment. Speaking of 'offences' (*skandala*) which must inevitably come, then specifically of those that are committed against 'one of these little ones' (Luke 17:2), Jesus directs His disciples towards forgiveness (cf. Matt. 6:14-15). 'Take heed to yourselves, if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him' (Luke 17:3-4; cf. Matt. 18:15-20). The Gospels close with the word of forgiveness, which is, as it were, the

outworking of *metanoia* within created humanity. Believers are to follow Peter in his repentance.

The Book of Revelation contains a severe warning against one of the seven churches of Asia and calls for repentance. To the church of the Laodiceans, Jesus says:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent (Rev. 3:15-19).

Repentance was preached by Christ on Easter Sunday afternoon, on the road to Emmaus, where He showed that His death and resurrection are the basis of repentance and remission of sins. Then we see those very words again on the evening of that same day, when the Risen Lord appeared to His disciples in an inner room (Luke 24:47). After breathing upon them and saying, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost,' He immediately followed with the statement, 'Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained' (John 20:20-23). Now, in the power of that Spirit, they saw the crucified, risen One, and realized that it was all for them. Their hearts must have melted as they gazed upon the Lord. To do so, is to realize our own unfitness, and at the same time His infinite mercy which transforms us into people who bow before Him in humble repentance and love. Repentance often (though not always) involves shame and sorrow for having offended God's holy law and it always involves a turning from a pattern of behaviour objectionable to God. And part of its process is a feeling of love to God for His great mercy.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this love that accompanies true repentance. He opens it up in one of his prayers in Ephesians: 'Bowing [his] knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,' Paul prays that God would give unto them 'according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his

Spirit in the inner man' (Eph. 3:16). This is realized in us as Christ dwells in our hearts through faith. The result of such Spirit-filled strengthening fills us up with nothing less than Jesus Christ Himself, who is the love of God incarnate. By His presence, we become 'rooted and grounded in love' (Eph. 3:17). In that way, our inner capacities become 'able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that [we] may be filled with all the fulness of God' (Eph. 3:17-19). As Jesus said in the high priestly prayer in John 17:3, 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who thou hast sent.'

To come to know this God means a profound repentance for life apart from Him. It motivates a personal turning to Him. At the same time, it is of great significance to note the Old Testament application of *shub* to the Lord Himself. 'Not only do persons turn (*shub*), God also turns (*shub*). That action whereby God receives to himself the penitent person is also described by the word *swb*. Now God is the subject. He promises to turn (*shub*) to the one seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. His response to someone's plea for restoration is to turn (*shub*) away his anger (Hosea 4:4, 5) ...'⁹

Other New Testament Words for Conversion (Repentance)

The New Testament expresses the same concept of turning from sin and turning back to God as the Old Testament. The main Greek words employed are forms of the verb *metanoeo* and the noun *metanoia*. However, Colin Brown shows that 'This process is expressed in the NT by three word-groups which deal with its various aspects: *epistrepho*, *metamelomai*, and *metanoeo*. The first and third both mean turn round, turn oneself round, and refer to a man's conversion We often find *pisteuo*, believe, expressly used with *metanoeo*, since faith complements repentance.'¹⁰

Epistrepho '... means a fundamentally new turning of the human will to God, a return home from blindness and error to the Saviour of all (Acts 26:18; 1 Pet. 2:25) Conversion involves a change of lords. The one who until then has been under the lordship of Satan (cf. Eph. 2:1 f.) comes under the lordship of God, and surrender of the life to God is done in faith, and includes faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 11:21) It is found 36 times in the NT ... is often synonymous with *metanoeo*.'¹¹

Metamelomai is not frequently used in the New Testament, and often has the sense of regret, but does not necessarily imply that this regret leads to true conversion. Judas, for instance, regretted how Jesus had been mistreated (Matt. 27:3), but did not finally repent.

‘The NT ... employs *metanoeo* to express the force of *shub*, turn round The decision by the whole man to turn round is stressed. It is clear that repentance is regarded both as an act given to man and as duty. It is a possibility given to man by God as an eschatological gift of grace, and it is also a duty required of him.’¹² But this turning does not come from ‘the will of the flesh’ (John 1:13), but from the new birth by the Holy Spirit. It is the activity of God Himself, yet involves at the deepest level the human personality. According to 1 John, ‘walking in the light’ (1:7), not sinning (3:9), loving the brethren (3:10), loving God (2:5; 4:19), believing that Jesus is the Christ (5:13), and willing subjection to the commandments (5:2) all come from the new birth wrought by action of the Holy Spirit.

Some have looked at this from a medical perspective. Dr Curt Thompson, a psychiatrist in Virginia, has looked at repentance from the point of view of aspects of neuroscience. According to his research: ‘When we pay attention to our minds ... we can begin to stop the disintegration and embrace the acts of confession and repentance that lead to redemption While sin reflects dis-integration, mindful integration is an important function of redemption. In fact, the creative and integrative activity of the Spirit is reflected by the integration of the prefrontal cortex through the stimulation of neural activation and growth (SNAG), which creates new life in the form of new neural networks.’¹³

The actions of confession and repentance leading to redemption indicate a tremendous restructuring of the old self in light of this new reality that impinges upon it. It is nothing less than a sort of ‘new creation’ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17), in which our whole personhood, once ‘dead in sins and trespasses’ (cf. Eph. 2:1), is made new with the newness given by God in the resurrection. This newness of who we now are in the risen Christ is not an escape from the body, as some ancient Eastern thought and modern western forms of Gnosticism would hold. In actual fact, a supposed flight from the body leaves us with the most terrible sin problems, and the guilt leading to final judgment. It would be a form of eternal death, where one is cut off from the grace of life found in Jesus Christ. Therefore we are called to turn

to the Holy and Merciful One in penitence and faith, for in Him, we shall be given pardon and eternal life.

Without denying our need to turn, in a sense our entire personal life is recreated so that the Holy Spirit integrates us into the living body of Christ. That is primary, and the secondary (and important) outcome is that thereby, in that new reality, we turn from our sin to God.

Given its supreme importance for the salvation of sinners, this repentance (*metanoia*) was a major note in the preaching of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist

The Gospels summarize the preaching of John the Baptist as a call to conversion. ‘To change one’s mind’, issuing in the turning around of the moral life occurs in real conversion. ‘The coming of God’s lordship ... is immanent and his judgment is close at hand; in the last span of time there is only one task for man, *metanoia*.’¹⁴

As the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* shows, ‘At the portal of the NT we thus find a concept of conversion which transcends Judaism and renews the ultimate insights of the prophetic piety of the OT (cf. Jer. 31:33; Ps. 51:10), but with a new eschatological certainty.’¹⁵ ‘With the preaching of conversion John connects the baptism of conversion ... a sacramental act of purification which effects both remission of sins (Mark 1:4) and conversion (Matt. 3:11).’¹⁶

Most remarkably, John’s cousin, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was sinless, and thus needed no repentance, submitted to this baptism of repentance.

Jesus Christ and Repentance

John had to have known of the Saviour’s holiness, for he stated, as Jesus was presenting Himself for baptism at his hand: ‘But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?’ (Matt. 3:14). Jesus answered him: ‘Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.’

The righteousness that Christ fulfills includes not only what traditional theology calls His ‘passive obedience’ – that is, paying with His blood the penalty due for our sins, but before that, His ‘active obedience’ – that is, the totality of His holy life in the flesh, in which He turns all our humanity back to loving and total obedience to the Father. He had no need to do this for

Himself, for He was ever the holy Son of the Father, doing all without diminution to the glory of the Father, in the power of the Spirit. He did it all for us, whom He by grace represented. As Saint Athanasius wrote:

What then was God to do? Or what was to be done save the renewing of that which was in God's image, so that by it men might once more be able to know him? But how could this have come to pass save by the presence of the very Image of God, our Lord Jesus Christ? ... When the Word of God came in his own person, that, as he was the image of the Father, he might be able to create afresh the man after the image (par.7).¹⁷

John Owen says some 1,200 years later:

First, by the obedience of the life of Christ, you see what is intended, – his willing submission unto, and perfect, complete fulfilling of every law of God Secondly, that this obedience was performed by Christ, not for himself, but for us, and in our stead Thirdly, then I say, this perfect complete obedience of Christ to the law is reckoned unto us ...¹⁸

Christ delighted to keep the Law of God throughout every part of His holy life. He was motivated by Psalm 40:8: 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart', which Hebrews 10:7 attributes to him. In John 4:34, He says: 'My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.' In Matthew 5:17, He states: 'Think not that I am come to destroy, but to fulfill.' In His hour of agony in Gethsemane, He cried out to the Father, 'Thy will be done' (Matt. 26:42).

The obedience He rendered was throughout His life, both 'active obedience' and 'passive obedience.' These two are so closely allied, that John Owen said: '... it cannot be clearly evinced that there is any such thing, in propriety of speech, as *passive obedience*; *obeying is doing* ...'¹⁹

The heart of the gospel is that Jesus died for our sins ('passive obedience'), but part of this good news is that in every part of His life, in our room and stead, Jesus did all that was necessary to turn our nature back to God, as He lived the life of perfect sonship. All of this is attributed to our account as we are put in the eternal right with a holy God. Thus, Paul can say: 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption' (1 Cor. 1:30).

Thus, he who needed no repentance, repented as Mediator in the place of those who were under the load of an infinitely needed repentance. Now this does not relieve us from the call to repent throughout all of our lives. On the contrary, we stand by faith in Him when we repent; and thus our repentance avails before God, for we join heart and soul to Him who did it for us, and God accepts our frail efforts in the One who submitted to the baptism of repentance for us.

Theologically, this is in the same category of our suffering for Christ, when called thereto. His sufferings are what make ours worthwhile. As 1 Peter 2 states: ‘for hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps ... who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed’ (vv. 21, 24). That means that the sufferings of Christ fully paid for all of our sins, but that payment in full does not remove us from having to suffer for His sake. It is the same with repentance. His vicarious repentance is ours, but since we are now in Him, we share that repentance, because it is a major aspect of our new life of sonship. Thus, the call to repentance always is an aspect of our union with Christ and will be found in a true Christ-like life.

Faith

It has long been observed that faith and repentance are twin sisters. Either could be placed first, all that really matters is that they always be together. If we speak in terms of causality, no doubt faith would come first, but temporally both arise at the same time by the acting of divine grace. As John Colquhoun says: ‘He gives these two graces together and at once in respect of time; and therefore, though in our conception of them, they are to be distinguished, yet they are never to be separated from each other.’²⁰

As repentance is the fruit of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, so is faith. Faith and repentance are the first breathings out of the new nature, created anew in Christ. That is to say, we have both a penitent faith and a believing repentance; they go together, as the Holy Spirit works both of them in us. Colquhoun wrote: ‘The tears of godly sorrow drop as it were from the eye of faith.’²¹

As B. B. Warfield brought out, in the Old Testament, there is no noun for faith, although one finds ‘faithfulness’ in several texts (cf. Hab. 2:4; Deut.

32:4, etc.).²² But there are several verbs for faith or believe, which are usually rendered *pisteuo* in the LXX. One of the main ones is the word from which we derive the liturgical response ‘Amen’ (to consider it established). Also among these verbs are: *bathak* (to confide in); *chasah* (to seek and find refuge in God); *galal* (to commit ourselves to God); *hebesh* (to look to God); *nismak* (to stay upon him); *dabaq* (to cleave to him); and *qayah* (to hope in God).

In the Septuagint, the noun *pistis* (faith) is used only once, but *pisteuein* (to trust or believe) is often used to translate *aman* [whence our ‘amen’], which conveys the idea of confident trust in God, and in His word. The New Testament takes over *pisteuein* for believe or trust in. As Warfield noted, when *pisteuein* is followed by certain prepositions, ‘the deeper sense of the word – that of firm, trustful reliance – comes to its full rights.’²³ When followed by *en*, the idea is firm fixedness of confidence in its object.²⁴ When followed by *epi* plus the dative case, it means steady, resting repose upon the object (as in Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6; Luke 24:25; 1 Tim. 1:16).

When *pisteuein* is followed by *epi* plus the accusative case, as Warfield states, the idea is that of moral motion or mental direction towards the object. ‘It is in this form of expression that those are designated who have savingly believed on Christ (e.g. Acts 9:42; 11:17; 22:19).’²⁵ He terms the construction of *pisteuein* followed by the preposition *eis* (used in the New Testament 49 times) ‘the special New Testament construction It means an absolute transference of trust from ourselves to another; a complete self-surrender to Christ.’²⁶

Faith is given rise to by truth; it is the appropriate response to a given reality. Saint Irenaeus said: ‘And faith is produced by the truth; for faith rests on things that truly are.’²⁷ As to ultimate reality, as Clement of Alexandria wrote: ‘The voice of the Lord is the only demonstration of himself.’²⁸ Clement shows that truth begets a response: ‘Knowledge is excited by outwardly existing objects.’²⁹

T. F. Torrance explains:

The question must be raised as to how we get inside this new world of meaning The answer given, for example by Clement of Alexandria, was that here we have to reckon with realities which, like the first principles in geometry or the simple facts of perception, are known on the strength not of

anything else but of themselves, that is, through a basic act of assent or faith in recognition of and in response to those realities. The right way to break through into the new realm of meaning or truth, therefore, is the way of faith, for unless we believe, we will not understand (Isa. 7:9). Now faith involves a conceptual assent to the unseen reality, for the proof of an unknown reality is its own evidence and the evident assent it calls forth from us. That is to say, if we are really to understand, we must willingly allow our minds to fall under the compulsive self-evidence of the reality, otherwise we merely lapse back uncritically into our own false preconceptions.³⁰

Thus, faith is in no sense opposed to reason. ‘Faith is the orientation of reason toward God’s self-revelation, the rational response of man to the word of God ... a fully rational acknowledgment of a real Word given to us by God from beyond us.’³¹ Faith, therefore, is not non-cognitive or merely emotion in its approach to God. Instead, faith is an intelligible and obedient response. It restores our access to the cognitive first principles on which reason properly functions. It puts us into contact with ultimate reality, which cannot be seen by the mortal eye, for ‘faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ (Heb. 11:1).

As I have written elsewhere, ‘In terms of ultimate reality, instead of unbelief being wise (and thus, somehow “scientific”) and faith being foolish (and “unscientific”), it is the exact opposite, as Saint Hilary says in his *De Trinitate*, III. 24: “Thus all unbelief is foolishness, for it takes such wisdom as its own finite perception can attain, and measuring infinity by that petty scale, concludes that what it cannot understand must be impossible. Unbelief is the result of incapacity engaged in argument. Men are sure that an event never happened, because they have made up their minds that it could not happen.”’³²

In all cases of rational procedure (or ‘scientific thinking’ or ‘true faith’) one distinguishes between one’s mind and the objective reality one seeks to know, thus assuming the reality of the external world; one seeks to understand a reality out of itself in accordance with what it really is, and hence one adapts one’s mode of enquiry in accordance with the object to be known.³³

Thus, the ultimate theological knowledge received in true faith is the inner-Trinitarian knowledge that God has of Himself, referred to by Jesus in

Matthew 11:27: ‘... no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.’ God, in whom is the Word (John 1:1), created mankind through the agency of His Word, whose ‘life was the light of men’ (John 1:4), and was ‘the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:9).³⁴

As far as the ultimate truth is concerned, namely, the Triune God, God has always revealed Himself and all of His verities within a chosen community.

... faith arises within the communion God has established with his people. While it is true that God makes himself directly known to individuals, yet at the same time, they need one another to know him accurately. An illustration of this necessity of community for discernment of God’s Word is found in the experience of the child Samuel. God spoke to him when he was by himself at night in his bed. The first three times that God called him, Samuel could not understand, and thought that it was Eli, the priest, to whom he went running. After the third time, Eli perceived what was happening, and instructed young Samuel to say, ‘Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth’ (1 Sam. 3:9). Samuel obeyed Eli, and then was able to understand the voice of the Lord. Hence, it took someone else in the believing community for Samuel to be able to grasp the Word of God.³⁵

This is at least part of the meaning of Paul’s description of the Church in 1 Timothy 3:15 as ‘the pillar and ground of the truth.’ Faith arises within the Church in its Old and New Testament phases, and it takes the Church together to know, interpret, and be transformed by the blessings of the Triune God, as Paul prays:

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he

wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:15-20).

This emphasis on the necessity of corporate faith is reflected in some of the Church Fathers. Novatian speaks of God as ‘He whom the Church knows and worships as God.’³⁶ He goes on to say a few paragraphs later:

In order that the whole world should not dry up in its aversion to the streams of his grace, he willed that through his Son apostolic messengers should be sent into all the world to instruct our race, that mankind in its condition might recognize its Creator, and if it would then follow him, would have one whom it might address in its prayers as Father, instead of as God.’³⁷

Augustine made a similar point in his great work on biblical interpretation, *De Doctrina Christiana*:

Let us not tempt the one in whom we have placed our trust, or we may be deceived by the enemy’s cunning and perversity, and become unwilling even to go to church, to hear and learn the gospel, or to read the biblical text or listen to it being read and preached, preferring to wait until ‘we are caught up into the third heaven’. ... Moreover, there would be no way for love, which ties people together in the bonds of unity, to make souls overflow and as it were intermingle with each other, if human beings learned nothing from other humans.’³⁸

John Calvin made the same basic point some one thousand years after Augustine, as he was commenting on Ephesians 4:10-13:

We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood safely under the education of the church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors. We see that all are brought under the same regulation, that with a gentle and teachable spirit they may allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed to this function. Isaiah had long before distinguished Christ’s kingdom by this mark: ‘My spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall never depart out of your mouth, out of the mouth of your children, or out of the

mouth of your children's children' (Isa. 59:21) But as he did not entrust the ancient folk to angels but raised up teachers from the earth truly to perform the angelic office, so also today it is his will to teach us through human means.³⁹

True faith is wide-ranging as it brings the renewed human life into union with Christ, so that it begins to see as He sees. Paul says in Ephesians 5:8: 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light.' The Scottish theologian, Thomas Boston, suggested some of the main ways that our spiritual eyesight is put right as we live in union with Christ by faith:

First, we are illuminated in the knowledge of God. Hosea 2:20 states: 'I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.' And Job 42:5 says that after coming through all his immense sufferings, and yet keeping faith in God, he proclaimed: 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'⁴⁰

Secondly, we are enlightened in the knowledge of sin. As with penitent David in Psalm 51, we do not blame others for our sins, but take their responsibility upon ourselves ('Against thee, thee only have I sinned ...' – verse 4). Paul wrote in Romans 7:13: 'Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.' (That is, God's Law is good in itself, but it shows in darkest, truest colors our sins; then, when grace intervenes, we can take action for forgiveness).

Thirdly, we are instructed in the knowledge of self. The prodigal son 'came to himself' down in the pig pen: 'And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' (Luke 15:17). Ezekiel 36:31 described this new self-knowledge: 'Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.'

Fourth, and above all, we are enlightened in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. As Thomas Boston wrote:

But saving illumination carries the soul beyond opinion, to the certain knowledge of Christ and his excellency (1 Thess. 1:5), for our gospel came not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance. The light of grace thus discovers the suitableness of the mystery of Christ to the divine perfections, and to the sinner's case. Hence the regenerate admire the glorious plan of salvation through Christ crucified, rest their whole dependence upon it, heartily acquiesce therein; for whatsoever he be to others, he is to them 'Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' But unrenewed men, not seeing this, are offended in him; they will not venture their souls in that vessel, but betake themselves to the broken boards of their own righteousness.⁴¹

Fifth, they are instructed in the vanity of the world. With the over-whelming reality of the Triune God filling them, things that are insubstantial and quickly passing away no longer hold any great allure for them. 1 John 2:15-17: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.'

In sum, we are enlightened in the knowledge of spiritual things. It is a sort of 'gestalt switch'; a major change in the way one sees the rest of reality, or a 'paradigm shift.' In a scientific context, Thomas Kuhn described what happens in the 'paradigm shift':

Both [men from different perspectives; one with an older view, and the other with a new one] are looking at the world, and what they see has not changed. But in some areas they see different relations one to the other. This is why a law that cannot even be demonstrated to one group of scientists, may occasionally seem intuitively obvious to another. Equally, it is why, before they can hope to communicate fully, one group or the other must experience the conversion that we have been calling a paradigm shift. Just because it is a transition between competing paradigms, it cannot be made one step at a time the shift must be made all at once.⁴²

Once that shift is made, traditional Reformed theology has distinguished three aspects of active faith: (1) information (*notitia*), (2) assent (*assensus*),

and trust (*fiducia*). These are three ways of looking at the same reality; they are never separated, and the believer thinks of them all together at the same time, not one after the other. By grace, we realize that Christ in His gospel is fully sufficient for our situation. Thus, we recognize that the information about Him in Scripture is true, as we see in Romans 10:9: ‘That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved,’ and in 1 John 5:1: ‘Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.’

In a sense, we ‘believe into Jesus’, and in union with Him, we implicitly assent to Him and His word, thus trusting in Him for all matters. To exercise faith in Him is ‘the pearl of great price’, which the highest wisdom leads us to forsake everything else in order to possess this most valuable of treasures (Matt. 13:46).

While this faith in Christ is certainly our personal faith, it finally comes from Christ and our relationship to Him, for He is ‘the author and finisher of our faith’ (Heb. 12:2). He stood in for us as our Representative and believed in the Father in all matters at all times, without any diminution. That triumphant faith exercised by our Saviour is credited to us by the Father and is worked out in us all our days through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The Authorized Version translates Galatians 2:20 as a subjective genitive: ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’ That is to say, it is ‘the faith of the Son of God,’ not ‘faith in the Son of God’ (which would be an objective genitive). The subjective genitive means that Christ Himself exercised faith, which is appropriate for Him who is ‘the author of faith’. Richard B. Hays discussed at length *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, and carefully argued that in terms of Greek usage, the Authorized Version is the truest rendition, namely, that it means Jesus Christ Himself had faith.⁴³ His faith does not relieve the necessity of ours, but rather is the basis for it.

According to Hebrews 11:40, this ‘better thing’ is something granted to the church after the triumph of Christ, that even excels the blessings known by the church in its Old Testament phase. John Owen explains that the better thing that we have is ‘the actual exhibition of the Son of God in the flesh ... and all the privileges of the church ...’⁴⁴

And Hebrews 11:40 also says that God provided it for us. Owen shows that the Old Testament saints ‘were never brought unto, they never attained, that perfect consummated *spiritual state* which God had designed and prepared for his church in the fulness of times, and which they foresaw should be granted unto others, and not unto themselves, 1 Peter i.11,12.’⁴⁵ The glorified Christ gained all its fulness for us, and because we are in Him, He continually makes it over to us, thereby enabling us ‘to overcome the world’ – ‘For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith’ (1 John 5:4).

T. F. Torrance shows keen insight as he explicates the significance of Christ’s prayer and faith for us:

We have seen the significance of his prayer life for that [i.e. restoring fellowship with the Father], but now we have to note that he lived the life of the perfect believer, who believed for us, who yielded to God’s faithfulness the perfect response of trust and faith, and who brought to God his Father the perfect response of thankful reception and appropriation. It was for our sakes and in our place that Jesus lived that vicarious life in utter reliance upon God and in laying hold upon his goodness and mercy....It was not for himself that he did that, for what did the Son of God need that he did not have? It was for ourselves that he lived that life of trust and faith in the Father’s goodness, of believing and appropriating the Father’s bounty, that in him our humanity might receive that which we blindly ask, find that which we unwittingly seek, and have opened to us the door of salvation beyond all our expectation.⁴⁶

Accompaniments of Faith

The Will

This faith which comes to us in our union with him who is ‘the author and finisher of our faith’ (Heb. 12:2) is accompanied by the healing and restoration of others of the so-called ‘faculties’ of the human personality, especially the will, the affections, and the conscience. It is not necessarily easy to distinguish clearly the mind and the will, but at least it is true to say that the will exercises ‘an executive function’, thereby making choices based on the assessment of the mind. In a sense, it is the mind in action. And that executive function is renewed by the same Holy Spirit who, in His regenerating work, brings us into the faith of Christ. This spiritual renewal,

in company with faith, orients the personality towards that which is good, and away from evil.

Paul says, 'But we have the mind of Christ ...' (1 Cor. 2:16), and the same verse speaks of His 'instructing' us, that is, He directs the actions to be taken by the mind, or the will. Psalm 110:3 stated that 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power ...'. In the words of Thomas Boston:

The will is cured of its utter inability to will what is good. While the opening of the prison to those who are bound, is proclaimed in the gospel, the Spirit of God comes and opens the prison door, goes to the prisoner, and by the power of his grace, makes his chains fall off, breaks the bonds of iniquity, wherewith he was held in sin, so as he could neither will nor do anything truly good, and brings him forth into a large place, 'working in him both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (Phil. 2:13). Then it is that the soul, that was fixed to the earth, can move heavenward; the withered hand is restored, and can be stretched out.⁴⁷

The renewed will has an implicit hostility to evil, and now struggles against it. This is one struggle that is 'good news'. It was good news when God put enmity between the seed of the devil and the seed of the woman (cf. Gen. 3:15). The start of a war is generally bad news, but this one is good news: 'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that you would' (Gal. 5:17). Although never universally victorious against evil within during this earthly life, the very good news is that a profound change has been made in the will of those who are saved, for as Romans 7:22 tells us: 'For I delight in the law of God after the inward man ...' And Romans 6:14 assures the believer that, in spite of any and every failure in this struggle of the will, 'sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.' Through it all, the child of God knows that 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21). He is among those who say with the Psalmist: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee' (Ps. 73:25). And with Peter he says, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life' (John 6:68).

In all our decisions, we are in unbreakable union with the One who said in the Garden, 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:

nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt' (Matt. 26:39). His holy choice undergirds all our lesser choices of will.

The affections

It is not psychologically possible totally to separate the affections from the mind and will, which is their context in the human personality. Yet all of us can feel that there is an area of strong emotion or affection inside of us, and that it definitely influences decisions we make, and how we assess the rest of life. Regeneration by the Spirit of God has deep influence upon our affections or emotions.

Thomas Boston spoke of regeneration making 'a happy change' upon the affections, and that they are thereby 'rectified and regulated'. ⁴⁸ He notes that this spiritual change rectifies the affections, and places them on suitable objects:

Regeneration rectifies the affections, placing them on suitable objects (2 Thess. 3:5), 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.' The regenerate man's desires are rectified; they are set on God himself, and the things above. He, who before cried with the world, 'Who will show us any good?' has changed his note, and says, 'Lord, lift up the light of thy countenance upon us' (Ps. 4:6) The main stream of his desires is turned to run towards God; for there is the one thing he desires (Ps. 27:4).⁴⁹

The power of the affections is of no small matter in human life. The staunch nineteenth-century theologian, Robert L. Dabney of Virginia, who would have been expected to emphasize the intellect, wrote in a different vein, and greatly emphasized the power of the feelings: 'The feelings practically make the man. Intellect is the cold, feeble magnetism which gives the ship its compass to enter by. Feeling is the motive power, throbbing within the vessel and propelling it; without which the ship, in spite of the needle pointing with its subtle intelligence to the pole, rots in the harbor and makes no voyage any whither.'⁵⁰

More recent studies on the structure of the brain have, in a technical sense, served to confirm Dabney's point. Psychiatrist Curt Thompson has gone into some detail on the neurological significance of the affections, and especially their place in people's behaviour:

The anterior cingulate cortex is often associated with the feelings that drive pleasure and reward-seeking behavior. It senses and directs the activation of behavior toward the most significant external or internal stimuli ... the neurons of the prefrontal cortex usually require *conscious attention* to activate them. The input the PFC receives from the brain's lower regions represents those emotional and memory states that are the bulk of daily human behavior. The degree to which the various circuits representing the disparate functions of the mind (attention, memory, emotion, language sensory perception, etc.) are integrated at the level of the PFC in a balanced fashion will to a large extent shape our behavior and attitudes.⁵¹

The Conscience

The conscience is the inward moral monitor, placed in us by our Creator. In regeneration, our conscience is not removed, but rather renewed into the image of Christ, whose conscience, as our Representative, was totally penetrated by the light and purity of God. He stood in for us, and what His conscience was like as the Holy One of Israel penetrates ours.

The unregenerate person certainly has a conscience, for that is part of their creation in the image of God. But without the renewing of the Holy Spirit, it easily misleads the soul. Proverbs 14:12 explains: 'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.' This conscience works deeply inside the person: 'The spirit of man is the candle of the LoRd, searching all the inward parts of the belly' (Prov. 20:27).

Robert L. Dabney discussed with insight how the human conscience is both a safe guide and an unsafe guide:

The conscience ... is intuitively certain of its judgment only in the primary cases where it apprehends the moral *principia*. In such cases only are we perfectly sure that it goes right, because in them it is the regulative faculty which the Maker himself has imparted to us to direct our moral judgments. But in all cases of deduced moral inference some second premise may combine, which may not be a moral truth, to lead the mind to an immoral conclusion.⁵²

But a great change occurs when the Spirit of God renews the entire personality into the likeness of Christ. Hebrews 9:14 tells us: 'How much

more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.' Hebrews 10:22 speaks of it as having the conscience sprinkled with his blood: 'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.' Thus, this coming into vital and lasting contact with the crucified, risen Christ does not leave the conscience unchanged. It renews it from within, so that it sees and feels what Christ Himself did and was in all His assessment of reality around Him.

The change in the conscience of the Apostle Paul is just one illustration of the renewal of the conscience now in fellowship with Christ. It is not always comfortable: for he cries out in Romans 7:24: 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' And following his renewed conscience caused shock among those who formerly knew him: 'But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed' (Gal. 1:23).

That supernatural transformation of conscience is what has empowered all Christian ethical endeavor, thus making the church an engine of profound moral renewal in a selfish world. The Living Christ directs the conscience in ways that touch the lost with healing power and makes 'all things new'. Hence, Paul commands believers in Ephesians 4:22-24: 'That ye put off concerning the former conversation [i.e. conduct] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' He then explains what this means in the renewed life, as guided by the Spirit-informed conscience:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members of one another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers (Eph. 4:25-28).

Paul immediately shows that it is the Holy Spirit who is the source of this holy transformation of behavior:

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:30-32).

The Apostle John summarizes these Godward and manward changes in the conscience, renewed by the Spirit, as consisting in the reality of love. 'No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit' (1 John 4:12, 13). Peter's testimony also demonstrates love as the end of this spiritual renewal. 1 Peter 1:22 says: 'Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.'

Above all else, faith brings us into the righteousness of Christ, so that because of who He was for us, and what He did on our behalf becomes ours in actual position. His utter holiness of life and total keeping of the law of God becomes ours. This is called in Scripture *justification*.

1. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II. xxii, p. 4.

2. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 127, 128.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

4. John Murray, *Works*, vol. II, p. 187.

5. Robert Rollock, 'A Treatise of Effectual Calling.' In *Select Works of Robert Rollock*, edited by William M. Gunn, (Woodrow Society, Edinburgh: 1849), pp. 31-32.

6. T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Resurrection*, p. 19.

7. T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), p. 15.

8. Wurthwein, 'Repentance and Conversion in the Old Testament,' in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, G. Kittel, ed., Geoffrey Bromiley, trans. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967), vol. 4, p. 985.

9. J. A. Thompson/Elmer A. Martens, *Shub*, in Willem A. Van Gemeren General Editor, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1997), vol. 4, p. 57.

10. Colin Brown, General Editor, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1986), from article on 'Conversion, Penitence, Repentance, Proselyte' by F. Laubach, pp. 353, 354.
11. Ibid., p. 355.
12. Ibid., pp. 357, 358.
13. Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul* (Carol Stream: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), pp. 184, 185.
14. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, p. 1000.
15. Ibid., p. 1001.
16. Ibid.
17. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, section 13.
18. John Owen, *Works*, vol. 2, pp.161-62.
19. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 163.
20. John Colquhoun, *Repentance* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 2010), p. 127.
21. Ibid., p. 130.
22. See B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, chapters 14 and 15.
23. Ibid., p. 437.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 438.
26. Ibid., p. 439.
27. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, p.3.
28. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, VII, p. xvi.
29. Ibid., VII, p. viii.
30. T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, p.102.
31. T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science*, p. 33.
32. Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 19.
33. Ibid., p. 20.
34. Ibid., p. 21.
35. Ibid., pp. 23, 24.
36. Novatian, *De Trinitate*, VIII., p. 40.
37. Ibid., VIII, p. 42.
38. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, translated by R. P. H. Green (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), preface, pp. 5-6.
39. John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. I. 5.
40. Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, *passim*.
41. Ibid., pp.211-12.
42. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 150.
43. Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Scholars Press: Chico, California, 1983).
44. John Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews 11:1-13:25*, vol. 7 (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1991), p. 217.
45. Ibid.

46. Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (IVP Academic: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2008), p. 125.
47. Boston, op. cit., p. 214.
48. Boston, op. cit., p. 217.
49. Ibid.
50. R. L. Dabney, *The Practical Philosophy* (Crescent Book House: Mexico, MO, 1897), p. 3.
51. Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising connection between neuroscience and spiritual practices that can transform your life and relationships* (Tyndale Momentum: Carol Stream, Illinois, 2010), p. 160.
52. Dabney, op. cit., p. 284.

CHAPTER 7

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND SANCTIFICATION

Since the fall of man, the descendants of Adam and Eve have not been in the right with God. That is the supreme problem of all human life, and nothing else comes close to it in significance. Therefore, central to God's plan of redemption is the justification of sinners back into the favorable presence of their Creator. Only One could put us in the right with God, and that was One who at the same time shared the Godness of God and the full humanity of man, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. By His vicarious work for sinners, God no longer imputes to them their sins, but rather imputes the righteousness of His Son to them. This occurs through faith, and it is followed by a sincere and life-long attempt to please the God who loved and saved them; that is, they enter the process of sanctification (or becoming more fully like Christ). Those who are justified have been adopted by the Father, and they are wonderfully aware of His nearness and love. Because of it, they will persevere in faith to the final goal.

Justification

God the Father graciously unites believers to Christ in the Holy Spirit so that they may share in the holy life of the Trinity. From their fallen existence as lost descendants of Adam, marked by self-centeredness and unbelief, the Spirit of God takes them up into the purity and joy of the crucified and risen Christ, so that 'for them to live is Christ' (Phil. 1:21). That is, by means of the mighty work of Christ through the Holy Spirit, the Father transfers them from a state of guilt and eternal condemnation into one of total pardon and acceptance with God for evermore. To employ the great biblical term, God *justifies* the formerly ungodly, thereby making them His own dear children. For a sinner to be justified from infinite guilt requires the work of the infinitely worthy Son of God, and that glorious accomplishment is applied by the Spirit of God Himself.

Biblical words conveying justification

Holy Scripture constantly testifies to our lostness and just condemnation as descendants of Adam, and so from this perspective the most serious question a sinner ever faces is how he can become right with God; or how he can be justified. We have to look at some Scriptural terms to see exactly what this means.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew terms *sedeq* and *s'daqa* probably meant something like 'conformity to a norm'. Alister McGrath says that in the prophets, *sedaqa* was 'that condition or state which was required of Israel if her relationship with God was to continue.'¹ At this point, McGrath refers to the nineteenth-century German scholar, Cremer, who shows that *sedaqa* 'refers to an actual relationship between two persons, and implies behaviour which corresponds [to that changed relationship] The relationship in question is that presupposed by the covenant between God and Israel, which must be considered the ultimate norm to which *sedaqa* must be referred.'²

The various forms of this word were generally rendered as *dikaion* in the Greek of the LXX, meaning approximately 'to justify' or 'to declare to be in the right', as in Isaiah 5:22, 23 and Micah 6:11. T. F. Torrance has stated: 'In the Septuagint or Greek Old Testament the verb *dikaion* usually relates to the Hebrew *tsedeq* or *tsedaqah*. *Tsedeq* in the Old Testament is always related to God and his holy will for man The adjective *tsadiq* means primarily "to be in the right with God" This understanding of God's righteousness and his act of putting a person in the right with his righteousness carries a forensic sense ...'³

In turn, in the Latin of the Vulgate, *justificare* was used as a translation of *sedeq* or *dikaion*. This verb was made up by the church; it was not in classical Greek. However most Latin speakers after the fifth century tended to follow Augustine's rendition of *justificare* as *justum facere* ('to make just'). And that rendition led the Medieval Church in a certain direction that led away from the actual meaning of the biblical verb *dikaion*.

However, as McGrath points out, 'But this is not what *dikaion* meant. The Greek verb refers to something outside the person in question (i.e. the estimation in which he is held by others, and which cannot be treated as a quality), whereas the Latin refers to the quality of the person in question (i.e. what it is about him that has caused the estimation in which he is held by others) the Greek verb has the primary sense of being considered or

estimated as righteous, whereas the Latin verb denotes being righteous, the reason why one is considered righteous by others.’⁴

He shows that a major theological and pastoral shift thereby occurred in Latin Medieval Christianity: ‘Viewed theologically, this transition resulted as a shift of emphasis from *iustitia coram deo* to *iustitia in hominibus*. This shift in emphasis and reference from God to man is inevitably accompanied by an anthropocentricity in the discussion of justification, which is quite absent from the biblical material.’⁵

Biblical Context of the Concept of Justification

As we think of justification, we must consider our overall relationship to God. Because that relationship has been severely damaged in the fall of man, nothing could be more significant than to restore the divine-human relationship. The early chapters of Genesis teach that God created mankind upright. Thomas Boston expands this thought:

... man was made ‘upright’ (agreeable to the nature of God, whose work is perfect), without any imperfection, corruption, or principle of corruption, in his body or soul. He was made ‘upright’, that is straight with the will and law of God, without any irregularity in his soul. By the set it got in its creation, it directly pointed towards God, as his chief end; which straight inclination was represented, as in an emblem, by the erect figure of his body ...⁶

But, as Genesis 3 teaches us, and as Boston goes on to explain:

Here is man’s fallen state: ‘But they have sought out many inventions.’ They fell off from their rest in God, and fell upon seeking inventions of their own, to mend their case; and they quite marred it. Their ruin was from their own proper motion: they would not abide as God had made them; but they sought out inventions to deform and undo themselves.⁷

After their rebellion, Genesis 3:8 shows Adam and Eve trying to hide from God among the trees of the Garden as for the first time they experienced all the inner consequences of sin: guilt, fear, the desire to protect themselves from accusation, and all the inner turmoil that arises out of broken relationships. The corruption of sin then brought forth death within the very

first family – for Cain murdered Abel – a corruption that would only grow and spread over time. Yet also from the very beginning, there was the promise that the seed of the woman would be redeemed through the Covenant. While there continued a godly line among men, as in the case of Adam’s son Seth, then, Enoch, Methuselah, and others (cf. Gen. 5), in general the whole of humanity became corrupt, so that ‘every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually’ (Gen. 6:5). God’s severe judgment against the human race became necessary, and the whole earth was visited by a universal, destructive flood (cf. Gen. 6 to 9).

And yet, in the midst of this judgement, we find that ‘Noah found grace in the eyes of the LoRd’ (Gen. 6:8). ‘Grace’ will be given much fuller meaning as the Old Testament progresses, and even more in the New Testament, but even this early in the biblical story-line, we can already see that the mercy of God chose to reach down to this one family of Noah. Thus, by means of an ark, the Lord preserved Noah and his family through the horrendous flood, which destroyed all others. The Holy Spirit is as present in this manifestation of mercy as He is found to be throughout the rest of the Scriptures, as some of the Church Fathers suggested in considering the significance of the dove, the harbinger of the end of the flood.

Of the three sons of Noah – Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen. 10:1), the line of redemptive promise was now to go through the descendants of Shem (from Shem, we derive ‘Semites’). This redeeming promise came from God. The text does not indicate any particular deserts on their part, so it means that they were chosen by divine grace. After God confounded the still rebellious human race by multiplying their languages at the Tower of Babel (cf. Gen. 11), he raised up one of the descendants of Shem, through Nahor and Terah – namely, Abram (later Abraham), to be the instrument of universal blessing throughout the earth: ‘And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing....’ (Gen. 12:2).

Abraham came out of an idolatrous culture, no better than the rest of the fallen human race, but God made promises of grace to him. As he believed these divine promises, he became the emblem of saving faith for all time, for anyone who ever comes to God: ‘And he believed in the LoRd; and he counted it to him for righteousness’ (Gen. 15:6). Thus, God makes a promise, and Abraham believes it. In other words, he exercises faith in God

and His promise. It is of significance to note that the Old Testament has a particular construction to indicate what the New Testament usually calls faith: one of the major forms of the Hebrew for 'to believe' or 'to trust' is *he'emin* from which we derive our liturgical 'Amen'. Thus we could say that Abraham 'amened' the Lord, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. That is, 'let what you say be established; I rest upon it.' What he 'amened' was the gift that God gave him.

Paul takes up this verse exactly in Romans 4:3: 'For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.' Paul goes on to show that this is faith, not works, and is in the category of divine grace (Rom. 4:4, 5). Thus, Abraham was justified by grace through faith. In other words, saints of both Old and New Testaments are established by faith. That is the way of salvation for all who rest in Christ for salvation. In Old Testament times, they looked in faith to a promised Messiah, and in the New Testament, they met Him in the flesh. This faith, both in Old and New Testaments, is the gift of God to His elect, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8, 9: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.' It is a gift, and that gift is received by faith.

This principle of being set right with God (i.e. 'justified') through faith and not works is expanded in Galatians 3:6-14. Galatians 3:6 quotes exactly Genesis 15:6 and goes on to show that the blessing of salvation to the world through the faith of Abraham, in one sense, makes the heathen to become children of Abraham: 'Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham' (Gal. 3:7-9).

Using human words respectfully (and thus not attempting to put the infinite God under the limitations of our human understanding), we could infer from Paul's words in Romans 3:26 that, at least from our own necessarily limited viewpoint, the forgiving of human sin was a 'problem' for God, whose holy character must always be maintained (and thus, He must deal properly with sin, which is directly contrary to His character): 'To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.' In other words, in forgiving the sins of the guilty, God must always act in accordance with His eternal

righteousness. So how did He do it? We see that the way He did it was an amazing gift.

This verse makes it clear that it was through Jesus Christ, who came into the place of sinners, lived a perfectly holy life, and sufficiently paid the price of their sins. In so doing, He died for our sins, and His resurrection was the proof that His sacrifice was accepted to make us righteous ('Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification' – Rom. 4:25). This is forensic language, which is why Buchanan notes:

The real question at issue is – not whether justification be judicial or moral – for it must be judicial even when it rests on moral grounds; but whether a sinner is accepted on the ground of a righteousness vicarious and imputed, or of a righteousness infused and inherent?...When the question is thus stated, justification must be regarded as involving a forensic or judicial sentence, on whatever ground it may be supposed to rest; and the two distinct alternatives are clearly presented to us – justification by Christ's vicarious righteousness imputed, or by man's personal righteousness infused.⁸

Divine justification constitutes a righteous status, as well as declaring it to be so.

A close look at justification shows that it works in a way that constitutes believers as righteous, and then declares them to be so. John Murray approaches the question in this way:

What is it that enables him to be just when he justifies sinners? ... In God's justification of sinners there is no deviation from the rule that what is declared to be is presupposed to be. God's judgment is according to truth here as elsewhere. The peculiarity of God's action consists in this that he causes to be the righteous state or relation which is declared to be. We must remember that justification is always forensic or judicial. Therefore what God does in this case is that he constitutes the new and righteous judicial relation as well as declares this new relation to be Or if we will, we may say that the declarative act of God in the justification of the ungodly is constitutive.⁹

Various scriptural texts demonstrate that two things are taking place when God constitutes sinners as righteous and maintains His holy character in

doing so.

The imputation of righteousness

Romans 5:19 states that: 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.' This means, among other truths, that righteousness is included in forensic justification. There is a parallel in Romans 5 between Adam and Christ. In Adam, sin and death entered into the world (v. 12), and in Christ, righteousness was won by Christ's vicarious death for His people (v. 9). Verse 17 summarizes the analogy: 'For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.' Hence it is Adam: sin, condemnation and death; and Christ: righteousness, justification, and life. Christ's righteousness is imputed to us by grace.

As John Murray wrote: 'That is to say, justification has not only righteousness as its proper ground, it is not only that God has respect to righteousness, but it is also a bestowment of righteousness and, because so, there is the assurance of life.'¹⁰ We find other references in the New Testament to this imputation of righteousness, as in Romans 4:3-6, 9, 11. Romans 4:9 testifies: 'Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.' Romans 4:11 specifies that this reckoning to faith involved imputation: 'And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed to them also.'

Imputation of righteousness is also taught in Galatians 3:6 (Abraham), and in James 2:23, which quotes Genesis 15:6. When the gift of faith is exercised, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. By this miracle, he or she stands with Christ and in Christ, as God assesses their lives, and finds them holy and perfect by His unspeakable grace. He sees them as He sees His Son.

The non-imputation of sin

Another moral miracle of grace occurs for the believer: their sins are no longer imputed to them, but to their all-sufficient Saviour. The sin and guilt of the world can be in only one of two places: either on the head of the

sinner, or it can be reckoned to the head of Christ, and thereby taken off the sinner's head. Romans 4:8 says: 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.' 2 Corinthians 5:19: 'To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.' 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that Christ was made sin for us, and we are made righteous in Him: 'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'

T. F. Torrance expounds together both the death of Christ for our sins (passive obedience) and His holy life (active obedience), both of which are imputed to us.

This mutuality of Christ's active and passive obedience is important, for it means that in our justification we have imputed to us not only the passive righteousness of Christ in which he satisfied for our sins in suffering the judgment of God in his death on the cross, but the active righteousness of Christ in which he positively fulfilled the Father's holy will in an obedient life. In other words, justification means not simply the non-imputation of our sins through the pardon of Christ, but positive sharing in his divine-human righteousness. We are saved, therefore, not only by the death of Christ which he suffered for our sakes, but by his life which he lived in our flesh for our sakes and which God raised from the dead that we may share in it through the power of the Spirit.¹¹

Faith is the Instrument of Justification

Buchanan shows faith's peculiar appropriateness to receiving justification:

There can be no doubt that in Scripture, a special connection is established between justification and faith, such as does not subsist between justification and any other grace Why is faith so appropriate to justification (so that it is connected to it as its appropriating instrument, rather than hope or charity)? The answer is that faith takes you outside of self to rest upon another. Its merit is not in itself, but in the one to whom it takes you.¹²

B. B. Warfield says essentially the same:

It is accordingly, solely from its *object* that faith derives its value. This object is uniformly the God of grace, whether conceived of broadly as the source of all life, light, and blessing, on whom man in his creaturely weakness is entirely dependent, or wherever sin and the eternal welfare of the soul are in view, as the Author of salvation, in whom alone the hope of unworthy man can be placed.¹³

The object of our faith is a gift, and the faith we have in Him is a gift. The believer's justification through faith is in the context of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, particularly in illuminating the mind to see the truth, often spoken of as 'the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit'. That is, the Spirit does not add anything to the Holy Scriptures, as they are already fully inspired by Him, but He does open the heart of the Christian to grasp the truth of what is there: justification through faith, and all the other verities. Calvin describes it:

... the credibility of doctrine is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its author. Thus the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it. ... Yes, if we turn pure eyes and upright senses toward it, the majesty of God will immediately come to mind, subdue our bold rejection and compel us to obey.¹⁴

More broadly, the Spirit opens the *nous* (the Greek can be translated mind or heart or soul) of man to God in such a way that when he is enabled to take hold of faith, that faith becomes the instrument by which the Spirit can begin actually to apply to the human person the dynamic realities of justification, sanctification, union with Christ and, ultimately, glorification - realities that are dynamic because they are centered in the life and work of the Holy Spirit.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states: 'Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love' (Chapter XI, par. II). All of this means that we are not justified *because of faith*, but *through faith*. It is an instrument or appropriating organ, not a cause. For instance, Romans 5:1 states that we are 'justified by faith', and

the Greek preposition for ‘by faith’ is not *dia pistin* (which would mean ‘on account of faith’), but instead *ek pisteos* (‘through faith’). That is, the preposition *dia*, followed by the accusative case, means ‘on account of’, whereas the preposition *ek*, followed by the genitive, means ‘through.’

Sanctification

When God, by His grace, puts us in the right with Him, then we are made part of His family. This means that our character and actions profoundly change from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. God’s redemption of His people brings them into closest fellowship with Himself. Since He is a holy person, we move in the direction of that holiness, in which we will be for evermore established. That is, after conversion to the Lord, we do not stay the same. Since we now belong to Him, we increasingly take on the lineaments of the Holy One of Israel. This process is explained in Romans 8:28-30, where we are told that the goal of God’s predestinating work is that we shall be like Christ, the eternal Son of God in the flesh.

What changes that entails! The essence of what happens is that we are brought into vital union with Christ, the gift of the Father to us, who makes apprehensible within us this divine union in and through the Holy Spirit, the gift of Father and Son to us. It is not a simple matter to describe physical life, and even more demanding to begin to describe the divine life that becomes ours in the Holy Spirit, who unites us to the living Christ. This is a new world for us unholy ones, for the Christ to whom we are united shares in the absolute and infinite holiness of the Triune God. But what is this holiness? We must turn to Scripture to find out.

The major biblical terms for holiness (or sanctity) are *qadosh* (in the Hebrew of the Old Testament) and *hagios* (in the Greek of the New Testament). The origin of the Hebrew word is thought by many to come from the concept ‘to divide’ or ‘to cut off.’ The idea is that the thing (or person) called ‘holy’ is cut off from the world and set apart or dedicated to God.

The word ‘holy’ is first used in Genesis 2:3, which says that ‘God blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.’ Throughout the Old Testament, ‘holy’ is used of vessels, places, days, and ceremonies. In Exodus 3, God says to Moses: ‘... take off thy shoes, for this is holy ground.’ Very often, holy or holiness is connected with both the name of God and the ark of the

covenant. Especially in the Psalms and in Ezekiel, holy is used with more personal connotation. In the development of revelation, we see that the primary usage of holiness becomes not so much an outward place or thing, but rather it is a personal being and quality, which is originally and essentially in God the Creator and Redeemer, and derivatively in men and angels, the created ones.

God's Person is the standard of holiness

The Old Testament exalts God's holiness. For instance, in Amos 4:2, God swears by His own holiness, and here holiness means His innermost being, which is different from all created being, and radically separated from all that is sinful. There are echoes of this uncreated holiness in the call of the seraphim heard by the prophet Isaiah: 'And one cried to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LoRd of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isa. 6:3). Much later, Habakkuk 1:13 says, 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity ...' David calls the saints to give thanks at the remembrance of God's holiness (Ps. 30:4).

Thus, the character of God with all its moral perfections is the standard of holiness. We see this in both Old and New Testaments. According to Hebrews 1:3, Christ shines out with the brightness of God's glory, and with His express image. In Christ we see what the holiness of God is in human flesh. It is to that supremely pure image that humankind is called to be conformed. Leviticus 11:44-45 says: 'For I am the LoRd your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy, for I am holy For I am the LoRd that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God; ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.' This injunction is quoted in 1 Peter 1:15-16: 'As he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of life, because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.' Jesus makes the same emphasis in Matthew 5:48: 'Ye shall therefore be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (The immediate context is that the disciples are to be kind to their enemies because God is kind to the evil. They are to follow the example of their Father and thus to show that they are His children.)

Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 indicate that in Christ we are being restored to the image of God, which was twisted in the Fall. We are being restored to knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. Hence, the Son of God is the model, and the Holy Spirit shapes us into His likeness through

His own presence and working. Ephesians 4:23 indicates that the ‘new man’ we are putting on as we follow Christ, is a matter of ‘renewal in the Spirit of our minds’. The Holy Spirit, who is the infinite Spirit, knows exactly how to come inside our finite spirits, and persuade them from within to follow the Word of God. In a sense, He ‘translates’ what is written into what is felt by the believer, in fellowship with Himself.

This process is profoundly personal, for the Triune God is infinitely personal, and we are created (finite) persons in His image. Hence, it is not a mechanical operation, but a tender and loving influence of the blessed Holy Spirit, who makes Christ’s character real within us, thereby turning us from absorption with self, to be focused upon God and others. Since the Holy Spirit is invisible, much of His powerful influence is not visible to us, for, in a sense, it is hidden from us (in spite of all the divine power let loose within us). In other words, a great deal of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives comes not with loud voices or impressive exhibitions of providence, but – as Elijah experienced – comes in ‘a still, small voice’, rather than by means of earthquake, wind, and fire (though, of course, these can be used).

This means that, in general, instead of an audible voice, or vivid dream, or unusual vision (all of which are always possible in the providence of God), we, from within, suddenly and distinctly, feel prompted to refrain from saying a critical word to someone, or to visit someone in hospital or even in jail, or to give funds to the needy, or seek to patch up an old difference with someone with whom we are no longer in fellowship. This is the Holy Spirit, but because of His hiddenness, we think it is ourselves (perhaps, ourselves at our best).

A hymn by Henriette Auber captures this point poetically:

And his the gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.
And every virtue we possess,
And every conquest won,
And every thought of holiness
Are his alone.

God’s Law is the Standard of Holiness

One could object, however, that doing right, in large and small practical ways, is simply following the clear teachings of Holy Scripture. Yes, but the point is that we need continual motivation to do so. The Holy Spirit is the divine gift within us to encourage our doing right. Of course, the Holy Spirit, who inspired all of the Scriptures, always leads us to do what He said to do in the written Word. The Word is fully sufficient, but we are not. This is where the Spirit of God prompts us to do precisely what He said to do. We greatly need that prompting. He prompts us from within to obey what is written in His Word. And that is a major part of the significance of the Word of God written. As for instance, when Jesus called people to repentant living, He took them back to the written Word as He expounded the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus thought that we needed the truths contained in the Holy Scriptures, and constantly took the people back to those written truths. Hence, the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us, opens our minds to grasp and obey what He inspired in the truths of the Scriptures. As a prayer in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* asks of the Lord: 'Lord, incline our hearts to keep this law.'

What is written tells us who God is, and thus, what He calls us to be. The law of God is the transcript of God's holy character. One can think of the Ten Commandments as letters of uncreated light showing us the essential holiness of God as it shines into human existence, showing what God means created beings to be and to do. The divine law is the revealed will of God by which we are to regulate our thoughts and actions in accordance with His holy perfections. But we will not see its beauty and desirability except the Spirit 'removes the scales from our eyes' and causes us to see. This is part of the process in which 'we are made willing in the day of God's power' (Ps. 110:3). It enables us to see the godliness (or spirituality) of the Law.

Paul speaks of the law as 'spiritual' in Romans 7:14 (in contrast to being 'carnal and sold under sin'), and as 'holy, and just, and good' in verse 12. These are attributes of God, which are used to characterize the law. Hence, lack of conformity to the law is lack of conformity to God's holiness. It is therefore the law which gives specific content to what it means to be holy in every area and activity of life. (This is not to say that the law itself gives us the power to be holy, but only the content.) In a number of respects, New Testament ethics are based on an exposition and expansion of the principles of the Ten Commandments as God's pattern for righteousness, and we see

this in the Sermon on the Mount and in the second half of many of Paul's epistles.

John Calvin's *Genevan Catechism* asks: 'Why are there so many admonitions, commandments, exhortations, which both prophets and apostles everywhere employ? They are nothing but mere expositions of the law, which conduct us into obedience to the law, rather than lead us from it.' In these terms, Calvin emphasizes what he calls 'the third use of the law' (i.e. the first use is to show us God's righteousness and thereby manifest our sin, thus driving us to Christ; the second use is to restrain public evil, and the third use is to admonish believers in well doing – cf. Calvin's *Institutes* II. VII. 6-12).

Holiness therefore is determined by what God has revealed of His own character in His written Word. Bishop J. C. Ryle of nineteenth-century Liverpool states it well in his book, titled simply – *Holiness*: 'Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find his mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing with God's judgment – in hating what he hates – loving what he loves – and measuring everything in this world by the standard of his Word. He who most entirely agrees with God he is the holy man.'¹⁵

The Holiness of God's Incarnate Son is the Standard of Holiness

God has shown us what a life lived in accordance with the Ten Commandments looks like as we contemplate Jesus, for His was a life summarized in love to God and man. This is why Hebrews 1:3 describes Christ as the character of God, why John 1:18 explains: 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,' and why Jesus said to Philip in John 14:9: 'He who hath seen me hath seen the Father.' 1 John 1:1-2 adds: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands hath handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us) ...'

Christ then is the holiness of God in our flesh, that we can grasp and know through the Spirit. The ultimate goal of this process of sanctification

is the transformation of our lives into the image of Christ. This is described in Romans 8:28-29: 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.' This is the goal of the decrees which reach back into all eternity and stretch forward into endless aeons – that we should be like Him. We are given the final results of these decrees for the elect in 1 John 3:2: '... but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.' And 2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks of this process during our earthly lives: 'But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' This verse, along with many another, shows us that we are made more and more like Christ, through the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit restructuring our very being as 'new men' in terms of what we have seen in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10.

It is not always a neat and clean process. One can think of how it is in an airport that is having a new wing built, extending out from the central hub. Often there are signs warning us not to walk into construction machinery or material, that say something like 'Pardon our progress.' Our lives, which are often being restructured in many a level, are not unlike that. There is 'junk' from the old ways, as well as much finer material from the new ways, sometimes piled closely to one another. It may take a good while to separate them. This pulling away of the weak and unstable material, and its replacement by the strong and stable, occupies many of the years of our lives, as the Holy Spirit 'reconstructs' us. This reconstruction into a building (or temple) that more closely reflects who God is, is often spoken of in traditional theology as sanctification (or 'making holy').

Aspects of Sanctification

Sanctification is present from two perspectives in the New Testament: (1) definitive and (2) as a process. First, it is considered a divine act upon God's people. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, after describing former horrendous sins of the Corinthians, Paul says: 'And such were some of you, but you were washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' (Here again we see the centrality

of the Holy Spirit in this marvelous change of status, in which sanctification, as an act, is parallel to justification and regeneration as acts.) 1 Corinthians 1:2 (in the Greek text) says of the church at Corinth that they are ‘sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints ...’ (Some English versions add in ‘to be’ – i.e. ‘called to be saints’, but the original makes clear that God’s calling itself constitutes them into the category of saints, although the rest of their lives will be involved in becoming more holy).

In like fashion, 2 Timothy 2:21 says: ‘If a man purge himself from these, he will be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master’s use, prepared unto every good work.’ Thus, sanctification is used of some definitive action that occurs at the beginning of the Christian life, which characterizes believers as the people of God.

We must ask what is the nature of this usage of sanctification as an act? The larger context of it is found in Romans 6:1–7:6. At the beginning of this section, Paul raises the question that often comes up when the Gospel of free salvation is preached: ‘... Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?’ He answers with a firm ‘no’: ‘God forbid’ (‘May it never be’)! He explains why not in verse 2: ‘How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?’ The key point here is that we have ‘died to sin.’ There has been a definitive break with that realm of life in which sin dominates the personality. In verse 6 we are told that the old man has been crucified and the body of sin destroyed, so that we do not serve sin. In verse 7, we are freed (in the original ‘justified’) from sin. In verses 10 and 11, we are alive to God and live to Him. Verses 12 and 14 show us presenting our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness, so that we are servants unto holiness. In verse 17, we obey from the heart Christian doctrine, and in verse 22, the fruit is unto holiness, and the end is eternal life.

We may summarize it as follows: sanctification as an act refers to our actual experience of union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Baptism is a sign of the reality of this union, as in Romans 6:3. Thus, Christians are in the happy position of having died with Christ and now being raised into newness of life with Christ. That is their true identity. Environment and genetics are important, but nothing so significant as being one with Christ as to who they are and shall be. In other words, Paul is saying that to be in Christ means that we are not motivated to live in sin. True Christians cannot be motivated by saying to themselves, ‘since God’s grace forgives sin, then I will enjoy committing even more sins.’ This is

simply not something that can occur once we are truly in Christ: that is the message of Romans 6. To be in Christ means that the Holy Spirit has united us to Him, and this union empowers our deepest personal motivations to wish to please Christ, rather than finding yet more excuses for sinful behaviour patterns. That was long ago promised by Jeremiah as the mark of the New Covenant:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LoRd, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LoRd: for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the LoRd: for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:33, 34).

Not sinless perfection

Verses found in 1 John 3:6-9 have been understood by some to imply that once a believer is in Christ, he is sinlessly perfect:

Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Some good scholars have interpreted this difficult passage to mean ‘not continuing to practice sin,’ and while that is not unreasonable, it does not seem to work here. Something more definite than the generally true proposition – ‘not continuing to practice sin’ – seems indicated. I tend to follow Professor John Murray here, who understands it to be a particular kind of sin that no true believer can ever commit.¹⁶ If so, what is it?

To introduce the point, Murray draws a parallel with Christ’s statement about the man born blind in John 9:2, 3. The Pharisees asked: ‘Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus replied: ‘Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God might be

manifest in him.’ Christ cannot have meant that the son and his parents had been sinlessly perfect. Rather, He means that the blindness was not inflicted as a punishment for some specific sin. Later, in John 9:41, Jesus said to some of the Pharisees: ‘If ye were blind, ye should not have sin; but now ye say, we see; your sin remaineth.’

Christ is not saying that if they were physically blind, then they would be sinlessly perfect. Instead, He is referring to their blind self-righteousness. Similarly, Jesus said in John 15:22: ‘If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin. But now they have no cloak for their sin.’ This can only mean the ultimate sin of rejecting Him and His Father. This uniqueness of a particular soul-destroying sin helps us to make sense of 1 John 3:6-9. We see in 1 John 4:2, 3 that the crucial test of the Christian faith is to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. Once a person has sincerely made that life-giving confession, there is never any going back. One is transferred into eternal union through the Holy Spirit with the crucified, risen Christ, and thereby shares His highest motivation: glory to the Father. Therefore, there can never be any question of his wishing to deny Him ‘who is their life’, which would be the case if one committed this particular sin of denying that Christ is come in the flesh. Because of where they are, and who they are, such a denial is beyond the range of possibility. That is the sin which no true believer can ever commit.

Sanctification as an on-going process

Most references, however, to sanctification in the New Testament are not to it as a definitive act, but to sanctification as a life-long process. Much of the progress of our sanctification is dependent upon our understanding and appropriating the implications of our identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Question 35 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism brings out two points about this identity: ‘What is sanctification? Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.’

As the Catechism states, first, we enter into our identity with Him in His death. This is generally called ‘mortification’.

Mortification

Although we are never, in this earthly life, sinlessly perfect, we do have an important role to play in moving towards that final perfection that God has set before His people. Romans 6 shows that we are to be active in this work of mortification. Verse 11 commands us: ‘Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ This is said to those whose ‘old man’ has been crucified with Christ, and who have been raised with Christ. Colossians 3:5 also commands: ‘Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth ...’ ‘Members’ refers to all of that we are: the parts of our bodies and faculties of our personalities. All of them, in varying ways, often call for mortification. Again, this is said to those who are already risen with Christ, who – according to Colossians 3:1 – are risen with Christ, and who will appear with Him in glory (v. 4). By regeneration through the Holy Spirit, they have – as we just saw – been definitively placed in the ranks of those whom God calls sanctified. Yet there is great work for the believer to do in order to appropriate this grand reality of death and resurrection, as it grasps their own personal being by virtue of the Holy Spirit working within them.

The seventeenth-century Puritan theologian, John Owen, writes: ‘That the choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.’¹⁷ Romans 7 makes clear the continuing difficulty faced by true Christians as they have to cope with the remnants of ‘indwelling sin’ in themselves (see, especially, vv. 15-25). Owen adds:

Sin doth not only still abide in us, but is still *acting*, still laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep at all times and in all conditions even where there is least suspicion ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would,’ Gal. 5:17. And it unframes our spirit, and thence is called ‘The sin that so easily besets us,’ Heb. 12:1 ...¹⁸

The Holy Spirit is the One who leads and strengthens us in becoming ever more ‘dead’ to sinful behaviour patterns. This mortification taking place in our lives is a gift. Owen is one of the clearest writers in identifying the mortification to which we are called with the Spirit of Christ.¹⁹ ‘We have all our mortification from the *gift* of Christ, and all the gifts of Christ are

communicated to us and given us by the Spirit of Christ. “Without Christ we can do nothing,” John 15:5 How doth he do it? Having “received the promise of the Holy Ghost,” he sends him abroad for that end, Acts 2:33.’²⁰

In very practical fashion, Owen lists three general ways that the Spirit mortifies sin within the believer:

[1] ‘By causing our hearts to abound in *grace* and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh This “renewing of us by the Holy Ghost,” as it is called, Titus 3:5, is one great way of mortification; he causes us to grow... in those graces which are contrary ... to all the fruits of the flesh ...’²¹

[2] ‘By a *real physical efficiency* on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening ... and taking it away He is the fire which burns up the very root of lust.’²²

[3] ‘He brings the *cross of Christ* into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in his death, and fellowship in his sufferings...’²³ In his *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, he writes: ‘There is not any spiritual or saving good from first to last communicated unto us, or that we are from and by the grace of God made partakers of, but it is revealed to us, and bestowed on us by the Holy Ghost ...’²⁴ ‘Whatever God works in us or upon us, he doth it by is Spirit ... *by him alone* is the grace of Christ communicated unto us and wrought in us.’²⁵

It is easy to see that Owen lays heavy emphasis on the priority of Spirit in our mortification. Yet he does not thereby evacuate the necessity of human response: ‘He doth not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our obedience.’²⁶ Owen says that the mortification of sin consists in three things: ‘(1) The *cherishing* and improving of the principle of grace, implanted in us by the Holy Ghost ... (2) In frequent actings of the principle of grace in all duties; (3) In a due application of the principle of grace by way of opposition unto the principle of sin. The Holy Spirit is the *Author* of this work in us, so that it is *our duty*, it is *his grace* and strength whereby it is performed; as also the manner how it is wrought by him.’²⁷

Meditation

One of the chief means of our dying to sin is by bringing the issues of it to the front of our minds. That is to say, we are to meditate upon dying to sinful patterns of life and rising to those we are given in Christ by the Holy Spirit. To come again to Owen, he emphasizes the importance of meditation as crucial to the human side of mortification: ‘Our communion with him

depends totally on carrying out the duty of keeping our thoughts on him ...' [He refers to Revelation 3:20 and Song of Solomon 5:1-3].²⁸ He also calls for the rational usage of the appointed 'means of grace' offered in the church: 'The Holy Spirit in this work doth ordinarily put forth his power in and use of means. He worketh also suitably to their natures, even as the faculties of their souls, their minds, wills, and affections are meet to be affected and wrought upon. He doth not come upon them with involuntary raptures His whole work is rationally to be accounted for by the Spirit of truth ...'²⁹

Rather than expecting some kind of emotional rapture (which of course is certainly possible, when it is in the will of God for someone), believers are to employ their 'sanctified common sense' in order to discern what God would have them do in particular instances. They may feel nothing at all – neither rapture nor depression – but they know what God would have them do in this case, and will seek His help to be faithful. Yet at the same time, to discern His specific will often requires considerable depth of emotional energy and serious thought.

A large part of our meditation is to call to mind the promises. This is a powerful means of abiding in Christ. Owen writes: 'To *act faith* upon the fullness that is in Christ for our supply is an eminent way of abiding in Christ The ways and means wherein Christ communicates himself is, and are, his ordinances ordinarily; he that expects anything from him must attend upon him therein. It is the expectation of *faith* that sets the heart on work.'³⁰ To state it plainly, we could say something like this: 'Expect God to do something when you go to church, where you hear the Word and partake of the sacrament; when you read Scripture, and when you kneel down to pray.' In this way, you are 'acting faith' upon the fullness of Christ. The Holy Spirit is with you in this, or you would not even think of it, much less do it!

The Apostle Paul surely included meditation in his instructions in Romans 12:2: 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.' He prays for this specific thing for the Colossians: 'For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing ...' (Col. 1:9, 10). Then he instructs

them where to point their minds: 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth' (Col. 3:1, 2).

The Psalms are full of such holy meditations. They are aspects of what is spoken of as 'waiting on the Lord': e.g., cf. Psalm 25:1-5: 'Unto thee, O LoRd, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed....Shew me thy ways, O LoRd; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.' Similarly, Psalm 62:1, 2 says: 'Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; he is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved.'

In Psalm 143, David asks God to hear his prayer (v. 1). He is all but overwhelmed by enemies (vv.3,4), but then he turns his heart towards God: 'I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands' (v. 5). Then he spends the rest of this brief Psalm stretching up his hands to God in prayer (v. 6) and calling on the help of the Spirit (v. 10); and he is confident that the Spirit will 'quicken' him (v. 11). Hence, true meditation moves into prayer, and into desires for obedience (v. 10).

Adoption

Our union with Christ in the Holy Spirit can be viewed from various perspectives, and one of them is 'adoption'. By means of adoption, God establishes us in the family of God, with immense privilege.

While God the Father is rightly thought of as the author of adoption, we remember at the same time that we are brought into the countless number of the children of God, of which Christ is the prime and original member: the uncreated One, and we are – through His person and work – brought in at the right time as created members. In that sense, we are adopted into brotherly fellowship with Him; and in that sense, He is the focus of our family life.

And of course, the Holy Spirit is the One who has supernaturally united us to the Father and the Son, in a specific action that depends upon our prior regeneration. John 1:12, 13 says: 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his

name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

Adoption is not the same thing as regeneration, though it is closely connected to it. It is not really possible for us humans to put an exact temporal order on all the varying aspects on what takes place in union with Christ. For instance, regeneration and adoption must be considered together, but we cannot put an exact temporal order upon them. Yet we can, and must (to assist our limited understanding), make a certain theological distinction between them. For instance, we could rightly say that regeneration is primarily an act of the Holy Spirit, while adoption is primarily an act of the Father. We see this in 1 John 3:1: 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.' Yet the doctrine of *perichoresis* reminds us that Father, Son, and Spirit are never separated either in being or in work. Still, the Scriptures assign a certain priority to various of the three Persons of the Trinity in the actions of redemption.

Although it is given in a different context, we see the priority of the Father in this matter of adoption in Ephesians 3:14,15: 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.'

Adoption is neither the same as regeneration, nor is it the same as justification. The great seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Turretin held that justification and adoption were the same.³¹ But this is to miss the great advancement given to the elect person by adoption. As R. A. Webb stated: 'Failing to take account of adoption in connection with regeneration would be like giving one the rights of a child without the spirit of a child.'³² John L. Girardeau in a significant chapter on adoption wrote: 'Justification does not of itself entitle to an inheritance; adoption does. Justification conveys a title to the rewards of moral government; adoption to a title of sons.'³³ He adds: 'The Scriptures make a difference between justification and adoption. They treat adoption as something over and beyond justification. So do the Westminster standards. Adoption accomplishes something distinctively different from that achieved by effectual calling and justification.'³⁴ We could say that adoption restores our filial standing after regeneration.

As Girardeau writes: 'Redemption contemplates and secures adoption as the apex of privilege.'³⁵ John Murray states it more fully: 'Calling,

regeneration, pardon, and justification are presupposed, and adoption supervenes upon the condition and status, established by these other acts of God, and initiates a status, and introduces to a privilege which calling, regeneration and justification, enlarged to the fullest extent, do not themselves define or explicate.’³⁶

The benefits of adoption

‘To be received into the number’ of the children of God is marked by a filial experience of the Holy Spirit: a direct perception of God’s personal love. This is indicated in Romans 8:14-16 and in Galatians 4:6. Romans 8:14-16 says: ‘For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear: but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit; that we are the children of God.’

According to Kittel, ‘... there can be no doubt that the use of the word [i.e. *Abba*] in the community is linked with Jesus’ term for God and thus denotes an appropriation of the relationship proclaimed and lived out by Him. Jewish usage shows how this Father-child relationship to God far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new.’³⁷

It does appear that people can be saved, and yet have very little sense of their new life in Christ. They may have very little sense of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Yet that situation can change immensely for the better. For the child of God who is blessed by the Spirit of adoption can know from the inside of their being that he or she belongs immediately to God, and thus cry out to Him with the intimately relational term for Father: ‘*Abba*.’ The Holy Spirit is inside their own created spirit, and has shown them from this deepest place of their personality, with unfailing clarity, that He is their gracious, loving, reconciled Father, which is the ultimate relationship of life. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is no blessing beyond this during our earthly life. Far from the bondage of hoping to work hard enough and long enough to be accepted one day by this holy God, our spirit is truly already liberated into the sense of joyous acceptance that will be true for all eternity.

We are not told in Scripture what part of the mind (or brain) is the primary seat of experimentally knowing the love of God, and we do not

need to know in order to experience its reality. But some modern experts on the structure of the brain have stated that recent research indicates that it is the right side of the brain which perceives this reality. While I am not able to assess much of this discussion, it will not be amiss to comment that Michael Gazzaniga and colleagues suggest that the left hemisphere is primarily responsible for ‘syllogistic’ reasoning, in which the mind searches for causal explanations about events and reaches conclusions based on limited information. The right hemisphere lacks such a drive to explain; rather it ‘sees things as they are with little alteration’. ³⁸

We see a sense of this directness of grasp of the great reality in Galatians 4:6: ‘And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.’ Girardeau expresses the results of it: ‘The servant with hat in hand stands at a respectful distance awaiting the orders of his master. The child of God ... rushes into the presence of his father, leaps into his lap, and nestles in his bosom.’³⁹

Question 34 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism states succinctly: ‘Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.’ Among other blessings, this translates into stronger prayer. Eighteenth-century Scottish theologian and poet, James Beattie says: ‘Just as a child in the house has nearer access to the father and can make his requests more boldly than a servant, so in the grace of adoption the believer may come boldly at all times and makes his requests, assured that his heavenly Father will hear and help.’⁴⁰

A sense of adoption also gives the Christian great hope in making sense of providence. John Murray writes: ‘Those who through the direct witness of the Spirit cry out “Abba, Father,” accept all the dispensations of his providence as those of the all-wise, all-holy, and all-loving Father in heaven.’⁴¹ What a tremendous relief of mind this is to God’s children, living as we must in a complex and often disappointing world! In place of bitterness at having to go through hard things, we learn to experience a holy calm, since we know a beneficent heart and all-powerful hand are behind and above all that can come into our experience.

Perseverance of the Saints

All of God's chosen ones, from being effectually called, regenerated – with its exercise of faith and repentance – and thus being justified, and adopted, and thereby taken up into sanctification, are granted by God the continuing reality of perseverance unto the final achievement of their salvation, where they are as much like Christ as a human can be.

Their perseverance in their union with Christ is in certain aspects like their continuing in sanctification. That is, the believer keeps on being sanctified until he or she reaches glory. That continuity also marks their perseverance. In a true sense, they persevere in sanctification. That is how it is understood in Question 36 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: 'The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.'

Some have termed 'perseverance of the saints' as 'preservation of the saints'. In the ultimate sense, that is true: the saints are only able to persevere because they are divinely preserved, as we shall soon see in various texts of Scripture. But it will not do to ignore the intense human effort called for in 'perseverance', and for that reason, it is best not to replace the word by 'preservation.'

External religious profession does not guarantee perseverance

Again, this is a matter of union with Christ: we persevere in the means of grace by which, as blessed by the Holy Spirit, we continue to live out of Christ who said: 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye truly my disciples' (John 8:31). Judas did not finally continue in the word, while Simon Peter – for all his sins – did. In Matthew 10:22, Jesus said: 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' He said that in the context of His servants having to suffer for Him as they announced and lived the truth. In the midst of their ministerial hardships, some would give up on doing so, in order 'to find their life'. But in abandoning His call, so as to preserve themselves, they would lose everything (v. 39).

Perhaps they are like the seed that fell on stony ground in the parable of the sower: it sprang up quickly, but not having much soil, it quickly dried up. Jesus explained that what happened was this: '... for when tribulation or

persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended' (Matt. 13:21).

Hebrews 3:14 conveys perseverance of the saints in the context of our continuity in union with Christ: 'For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' Here it is presented in terms of our specifically holding on to Christ. Our activity of faith and obedience is in view. But on the contrary, not to keep believing is to depart from the living God (Heb. 3:12). That results from having allowed sin to harden the heart (Heb. 3:15) – like the disobedient Israelites under Moses in the wilderness (vv. 16-19). But to persevere is to keep the heart soft, by looking to our High Priest (Heb. 4:14), and continually coming 'boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need' (v. 16).

It is essential to note that perseverance is true only of those who belong to Christ. Some confused evangelicals have taught that one becomes a Christian by a sort of external transaction (such as making a public profession of faith), without ever having become regenerate. R. B. Thieme taught this in a booklet – *Of Apes and Peacocks*. He actually stated that once you have 'made a decision for Christ', then even if you become an atheist and persecute the Church, your salvation is still secure because of what he calls 'the perseverance of the saints'. But to die as an atheist hating the Church sadly shows you never were a saint.

To be a saint, of whom perseverance can be affirmed, means that one has been effectually called and regenerated. No sort of verbal profession or external 'transaction' will replace those realities experienced by all Christians. Jesus told us in Matthew 25:41 and 45-46: 'Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels Then shall he answer unto them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.'

Hebrews 6 contemplates this in verses 4-6: 'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.' These religious professors are in the

category of having had a ‘temporary faith’, as mentioned in the parable of the sower (as in Mark 4), where they for a time received the Gospel with gladness, but the seed was on stony ground with little soil. It did not go through to thorough regeneration, marked by true faith and repentance.

Yet temporarily they did experience some of the same effects that occur in real believers: that is, they had a certain sense of the moving of the Spirit of God and of heavenly reality. But they never really yielded soul and body to the Lord, even though they felt heavenly realities for a time. Such people never became converted, and at the end their lack of real conversion will be seen with awful results. It is likely that even experienced soul winners cannot tell the difference – at least, to start with. But these people can fall away, without their apostasy in the least negating true perseverance of the saints.⁴²

Why the saints persevere

1 Peter 1:4-5, among other passages, clearly teaches us why true saints persevere in a very hard world, where we must cope (in the words of Eph. 6:12) with ‘principalities, ... powers, ... the rulers of the darkness of this world, ... spiritual wickedness in high places.’ According to Peter, we have the hope of ‘an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.’

Verse 5 affirms that the saints are ‘kept by the power of God’. God is omnipotent and therefore no power can possibly take away what He is keeping. Jesus firmly stated in John 10 that nothing can take the sheep out of the hand of God: ‘My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand’ (v. 29).

The way the Father keeps them is through means of their faith – ‘through faith unto salvation.’ That, by the way, is why a merely external religious professor will not be kept unto final salvation: he never had saving faith. All of those with true faith will be kept to the final consummation of salvation: ‘ready to be revealed in the last time’ (1 Pet. 1:5). Throughout this process, immense activity and energy are contemplated on the part of the believer, rather than a listless sort of quietism or hope in fatalism. Instead of waiting to see what fate will bring at the end, it is a life-long living face-to-face with the personal God, and although unseen, God is

constantly intervening in the activity of His saints, so that they do not fail to keep on.

We see this surrounding of the saints by the Father's constant care in the words of Jesus that show that they, as adopted children, are an irrevocable donation of the Father to the Son. John 6:39-40 explains: 'And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.' In other words, those who come to the Son – that is – who believe on Him, have been given by the Father to the Son (John 6:37). To have come to Christ in faith is therefore a result of having been given by the Father to the Son. This divine donation is irrevocable; it cannot be lost. Indeed, even the bodies of those so given will not finally be lost in the dust, but they will be raised up (John 6:40).

Until that glorious day, Christ is interceding for them, as we see in John 17:24: 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.'

1. Alister McGrath, *Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 8.

2. Ibid.

3. T. F. Torrance, *Atonement*, p. 100.

4. McGrath, op. cit., p. 15.

5. Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

6. Boston, op. cit., p. 38.

7. Ibid.

8. Buchanan, op. cit., p. 228.

9. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 122, 123.

10. John Murray, *Works*, vol. 2, p.208.

11. T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 155.

12. Buchanan, op. cit., p. 385.

13. B. B. Warfield, 'Faith' in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, p.423.

14. Calvin, *Institutes*, I. VII. 4.

15. J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, p. 22.
16. John Murray, *Works*, vol. II, pp. 281-284.
17. John Owen, *Works*, vol. VI, p. 9.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
19. A recent offering on the subject may be worth looking at: *Conformed to the Image of His Son: Reconsidering Paul's Theology of Glory in Romans* by Dr Haley Goranson Jacob, and published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, in 2018.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p. 440.
25. Owen, *Works* III, pp. 26, 27.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 549, 550.
28. Owen, *Works* VII, pp. 347, 348.
29. *Ibid.*, III, pp. 224, 230.
30. *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 79, 80, 83.
31. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II, p. 657.
32. R. A. Webb, *Christian Experience*, p. 359.
33. John L. Girardeau, *Discussion of Theological Questions*, p. 479.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 480.
35. *Ibid.*
36. John Murray, *Works*, II, p. 228.
37. G. Kittel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 6.
38. Daniel J. Siegel, op. cit., p. 238.
39. Girardeau, op. cit., p. 493.
40. Beattie, op. cit., p. 214.
41. John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, Systematic Theology (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1977), p. 230.
42. C. R. Vaughan discusses this temporary faith in terms of the 'rocky ground' convert: 'It was a faith *without repentance*. It was the joy which springs up on the presentment of a hopeful prospect without paying just regard to the conditions and preliminary steps to secure it ... it was a movement in a part of the heart only, in the desire of well-being, but not in its moral tastes and affections. It was the dread of danger, breeding hope of escape on the presentment of pleasing truths; but not the revolt of the whole heart, affections, tastes, desires, and fixed purposes, *against sin*, leading to the assured hope of escape of the presentment of the gospel remedies ...' in *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1894), p. 94.

CHAPTER 8

THE CHURCH

The Church is a major theme in Old and New Testaments. The transference of the Spirit shines through the risen Christ, thus forming a spiritual body, the Church. God Himself is the Father of believers, and the Church can be considered their mother. Scripture speaks of it as an ‘assembly’, composed of those who are called out of the world and into it. Various images or ‘types’ pertaining to the church are given in Scripture: Priest, King, Prophet, Sheepfold, Field, Jerusalem above, Bride of Christ, Body of Christ. We look at the oneness and variety of the members of Christ’s body, and see how the covenant is fulfilled in this body. Old Testament Israel is its presupposition, and its structure is based on and developed from Israel. Government by elders is constant in both Old and New Testaments. To the elders are given ‘the keys of the kingdom’, and they operate in connection with the various congregations, which compose the worldwide church. Christ’s authority is carried out through them across the ages. The risen Christ still shines through His church to a darkened world.

The Body of Christ

As the saints in the Old Testament were part of Israel, living on the promises of grace given to Abraham and his seed (and promised as early as Adam and Eve, in Genesis 3:15), so the saints in the New Testament are part of the Church of Christ, which is a renewal and massive expansion of the Israel that lived within the promises of the overarching Covenant of Grace. This is a sort of transformation by an ever greater presence of Christ. They are ‘saints’ because God has counted sinners to be righteous as the operation of divine grace has touched them through faith in Christ, to whom they have become united in the Holy Spirit, God’s gift to them. All those who exercise saving faith in Christ are part of a massively greater entity: the Christian Church.

Although the Triune God is always fully satisfied within Himself, without the slightest need of any to help Him be fulfilled, still He is a Being

of such overflowing generosity that He chose to create a vast host of persons in His image, so that He might share with them the blessings of His own life. *The Shepherd of Hermas* (written soon after the New Testament) said that ‘the world exists for the church’. That is to say, that the major purpose for the creation of all things out of nothing was to have a place in which to put the image-bearers of God: Adam and Eve, male and female, and their descendants. Out of this vast host of image-bearers of God would be drawn the Church. God would reverse the dreadful consequences of their sin and guilt, so they could come back into His wondrous fellowship, thus sharing His eternal life and joy.

From this point of view, it could be said that God created the human race so that out of it He could draw a bride for His well-loved Son. That final purpose of creation is seen in the last chapters of the Book of Revelation, which shows the final action of creation history to dissolve into the bliss of eternity at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (cf. Rev. 19:9). Ephesians 5 speaks of the relationship of Christ and His Church as one of marriage (cf. vv. 22, 23, 32).

Staniloae describes this transforming union in terms of what happens to Christ’s body after the resurrection, and then how the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ’s resurrection body to the people of God: He calls it ‘transparence’:

The Spirit’s full transparence through Christ’s body after the resurrection – and, implicitly, the sensing of the intensity of his hypostatic presence – is due to the complete pneumatization of the Lord’s body; this pneumatization also makes Christ better felt as a hypostasis, better felt in the intensity of his work. ... Therefore the Spirit’s full transparence is at the same time a spiritualtransparenceandagreatlyincreasedintensityofChrist’spresence.¹

The involvement of the Spirit in the resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:11) meant that His risen body became a spiritual body. As Staniloae notes, this made Him the more adept to be inside of us, because He now transcended the limitations of His natural body. This is to say that a major aspect of Christ’s body after the resurrection is its spiritualization. This is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, where he contrasts the natural body and the spiritual body: ‘It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first

man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly' (vv. 44-45; 49).

Following some of the ancient Church Fathers, John Calvin who – following the entire Christian tradition – called God our Father, also called the Church 'our mother'. Hence, we cannot have God for our Father without having the Church for our mother. Calvin writes:

But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title 'mother' how useful, indeed, how necessary it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt. 22:30). Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah [Isa. 37:32] and Joel [Joel 2:32] testify.²

Unlike one branch of Protestant Evangelicals (known as 'Dispensationalists'³) main-line believing Protestants, along with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, see the Christian Church as a renewal and extension of Old Testament Israel. So, in order to comprehend to some degree what the Church is, we first need to contemplate its earlier Old Testament form in Israel.

Old Testament Words for Church

There are two major words for 'church' in the Old Testament scriptures: (1) *qahal* and (2) *edah*. Both Hebrew terms usually refer to 'assembly', especially to the assembly of God's people. There seems to be no clear distinction between the meanings of these two words.⁴ Both of these words are usually translated in the LXX as *ekklesia* and sometimes as *synagogue*. Here again, there does not seem to be any real distinction in the meaning of the two terms.

The first example of *qahal* as *ekklesia* is Deuteronomy 4:10 – to 'summon an assembly'. This term is used in several important passages (Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 18:16) – 'the day of the assembly' (*qahal yom*; 'emera

ekklesias). The assembly is the covenant people of God gathered before Him, as in Exodus 19:5-25; 1 Kings 8:14, 22, 55, 65; 1 Chronicles 13:2, 4; 2 Chronicles 6:3, 12, 13; 7:8. This assembly is ‘God’s own possession from among all peoples ... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:5, 6). This exact phrase is taken over by Peter and applied to the Christian Church in 1 Peter 2:9, 10.

The first Christian martyr, Stephen, when speaking of Moses in Acts 7:38, said: ‘This is he who was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel that spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, who received living oracles to give unto us.’

John Murray summarizes the evidence: ‘The Assembly of God’s people was not a passing phase of Israel’s history; it was not ephemeral. The references cited above make plain that it was a permanent feature of Israel’s identity (cf. Ps. 22:22, 25; Joel 2:16; Micah 2:5 ...). The tabernacle was the focus of that assembly and of the worship ...’⁵

New Testament words for Church

As we have noted, *ekklesia* is the main word for church. By its etymology, it could mean ‘called out’, but the word usage puts the emphasis on ‘called together’ or ‘assembled’, as we have seen in *qahal*. And then, as we have also noted, there is a second word that can be used of the church: *synagogue*.

Bavinck explains why the former word (*ekklesia*) became predominant over the latter (*synagogue*): ‘When the Jews and the Christians went their separate ways for good and all, the usage gradually developed of calling the gathering of the Jews by the name *synagogue* and that of the Christians by the name *ecclesia* (community of believers or church), and this usage has remained in force up to the present day. Originally no such difference of force characterized the two terms. In James 2:2 (and Hebrews 10:25) the word *synagogue* is used for the gathering of the Christian church, and in Acts 7:38 (and Hebrews 2:12) the word *ecclesia* is used to refer to the gathering of the people of Israel. In fact, in Acts 19:32, 39, and 40 the latter term is used for a general popular meeting. But the separation of the Jews and the Christians played into the hands of different meanings for the two terms.’⁶

Biblical images of the Church

To begin to grasp the biblical teaching about what the Christian Church is, we must look at some of the images and pictures the Bible uses of the redeemed people of God on earth. Throughout the Old Testament we find a number of 'types' (or pointers) to the saving reality which Christ and His Church have fulfilled, and with which they are in solidarity.

These pictures, which are often taken up by New Testament writers, frequently convey the theological meaning of that which they represent (in this case, the church). Most of these images primarily speak of Christ, but secondarily relate to His people.

Priest

We find twelve tribes and then twelve apostles; one high priest, upon whose death those who were under house arrest in one of the cities of refuge because of having killed someone, were set free (cf. Num. 35); one true shepherd of the flock (cf. Ezek. 37:24); the Davidic King (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:20-37; Ps. 72).

King

Often in the New Testament, Psalm 110 (a messianic song about Christ as king), is applied to Christ as king (cf. Matt. 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:13; 10:12-13; Rev. 5:5).

Prophet

Christ is the prophet, long before predicted in the Old Testament (Deut. 18:15-19; cf. John 1:21, 45; 6:14; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). Christ not only speaks the true Word of God, but *is* that Word (Heb. 1:1,2; John 1:1-14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:10).

A Sheepfold

In the teaching of Jesus, the church is a sheepfold to which He is the door, as in John 10:1-10. Her people are the flock of which God foretold that He would be the Shepherd (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11ff.). The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11-15). In 1 Peter 5:4, He is the chief shepherd, who shall give a crown of glory to those who feed the flock.

A Field

The Church is a field to be cultivated as 1 Corinthians 3:6-9:

I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

We cannot miss here the interpersonal communion between God and His people, for whom He provides the ministry. The living vitality of this ministry is in the Holy Spirit.

This image is expanded in 'Lumen Gentium' ('Light of the World' by the Second Vatican Council):

On that land grows the ancient olive tree whose holy roots were the patriarchs and in which the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile has been brought about, and will be brought about (Rom. 11:13-26). The Church has been cultivated by the heavenly vinedresser as his choice vineyard (Matt. 21:35-43; Isa. 5:1ff.). The true vine is Christ, who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us.⁷

This shows that the risen Christ comes inside our lives in His Holy Spirit, making us one with Him, and causing us to produce fruit that bears the qualities of the very life of Christ.

A building

The interpersonal relationship between Christ and those whom the Holy Spirit unites to Him is so rich that it takes many different images to represent it. Various biblical metaphors show Christ as: (1) the architect and builder of His church, as in Matthew 16:18: 'I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it ...' (2) Christ is the foundation of that building (although He causes the apostles to share in it): 'Other foundation can no man lay, save that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 3:11). (3) Christ is the cornerstone, as in 1 Peter 2:4f.

Related metaphors show believers as 'being built into a holy temple for a dwelling place of God through the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). Believers through Christ are spoken of as being 'living stones' (1 Pet. 2:5). We are instructed to take care how we build on this foundation (1 Cor. 3:12-17).

These images repose upon the reality of such close interconnection between Christ and His people that physical representations (such as stones) are transcended by the personal relationship established by the Holy Spirit within members of the church.

So in general, we can say that most of these images primarily speak of Christ, but secondarily relate to His people.

The Jerusalem Above: Our Mother

Various texts of the New Testament show us significant personal contrasts that deepen our understanding of the developing differences between Christianity and the Judaism from which it came. Galatians 4:26 states: 'But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all....' This verse is situated in a passage which is an 'allegory' (Gal. 4:24) of the difference between the two covenants, Mount Sinai below, and Jerusalem above. The Jerusalem (or Hagar, or Mount Sinai – v. 25) below refers to the Judaism whose children are in bondage to salvation by law. The Jerusalem above is free, and is the mother of free children, who are saved by grace, through the promise, received through the presence of the Spirit (vv. 26-29).

This 'allegorical' (or 'typological') contrast between Jerusalem above and below in terms of bondage by law and salvation by the Holy Spirit is worked out in Hebrews 12:18-24. Note verses 22 and 23:⁸ 'But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect....'

Revelation 3:12 uses much the same terms: 'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.' We move here from beautiful physical stones to the writing of God's personal characteristics within the believer's personality. Psalm 87:5 long before used a closely related phrase: 'And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her.'

F. F. Bruce has summarized the position: 'For Paul it is the heavenly Jerusalem that is the counterpart of Sarah, the mother of the free-born

people of God; cf. “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God,” prepared by him for men and women of faith (Heb. 11:10, 16).’⁹

Such typology shows us that being a Christian on earth is in no sense limited in its significance to the space and time of which our world functions. It is already rooted in God’s eternity, which is our true and final home.

The Bride of Christ

The most intimate and precious relationship known among humans – a loving marriage – reflects the amazing closeness and affection between Christ and His church. The individual believer is part of this chosen bride, and his or her life is shining with glad significance because of it. Nothing we can know on earth surpasses this. It is the goal for which we have been created and redeemed.

Both Paul and John speak of the Church as the ‘Bride of Christ.’ In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul says: ‘For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.’ In Ephesians 5, he makes an analogy between the partners in Christian marriage and Christ and the believers: ‘Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything’ (v. 24). It was this bride whom Christ ‘loved and gave himself for ..., that he might sanctify and cleanse ... with the washing of water by the word ...’ (vv. 25, 26). She is the one to whom He unites Himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom He unceasingly ‘nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church’ (v. 29). Once this bride has been united to Him, Christ wills her to be joined to Him with love and submission, as we saw above (v. 24). This joining is made real by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In Revelation 19, John speaks of the Church as being made ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb (v. 7). In 21:2 she is ‘the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband’, and in verse 9, ‘the bride, the Lamb’s wife’. In 22:17, she speaks alongside the Holy Spirit: ‘And the Spirit and the bride say, Come ...’

The Body of Christ

As we think of the body of Christ, we must consider the essential place of His human nature. Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man in order to save man. Galatians 4:4, 5 states:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ ...

The writer of Hebrews states:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same: that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (2:14-17).

By this means, he restores our humanity to union with God (broken in Adam's sin), and He makes atonement for our sin in that humanity which was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He redeems our humanity, as Calvin says: 'by the whole course of his obedience.'¹⁰ Through His holy life, atoning death, and glorious bodily resurrection, He transforms our humanity into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). This transformation occurs as the Holy Spirit works within us the supernatural changes from Adamic selfishness to Christ-like love and obedience.

He replaces Adam, and 'recapitulates' His experience (as Irenaeus often said, following Paul): 'As by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead' (1 Cor. 15:21); 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming' (1 Cor. 15:22, 23). The Holy Spirit mysteriously conveys to our innermost being the same spiritual reality that raised the dead body of Christ.

Peter states that in Jesus' resurrection is our resurrection: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet. 1:3). In His ascension, He takes our humanity – in His glorified body – up to heaven, so that He 'hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6).

From the glory realm, Christ communicates His Spirit to His elect people, baptizing them into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). Through Him, we are united to Christ's human nature in death and resurrection. That union makes us crucified and risen and is the basis of all Christian ethics and good works, as we see in Romans 6:3-6:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Christ as Head of the Body

Here we are presented the organic connection of head and body. As John Murray says:

The figure of the body implies an organic relationship that exists in an infinitely higher plane than anything with which we are acquainted in our own phenomenal existence. A super-personal collective, such as we have in the institution of the state, does not exemplify this organic character, and falls short of what obtains in the mystical body of Christ.¹¹

Rather, it is like what Jesus says about the branches abiding in the vine, in John 15. The fulness flows from the head to the members. The church thereby is the receptacle of the fulness of life which flows from Christ, its living head. Hence, as Ephesians 1:23 says, '[the church] is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.' The head fills the members with His fulness to make them radiant with His life and glory so as to make them like Himself. Thus, according to Ephesians 3:19, when we are in the church, we

are ‘to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.’ This continues, ‘Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’ (Eph. 4:13). Similarly, Colossians 2:10 tells us: ‘And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.’

This fulness which resides in Christ, and which from there is being communicated to His body, the church, has such qualities as ‘fulness of truth and grace’ (John 1:14); ‘treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col. 2:3); fulness of life (cf. John 5:26); fulness of power (cf. Matt. 28:18), and fulness of grace: ‘Out of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace’ (John 1:16). And it is the Holy Spirit, God’s gift to us, who brings this wondrous fullness into us.

The Head Causes the Body to Grow

In both Ephesians and Colossians, we are shown the figure of the head supplying all that the body needs to grow:

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:15, 16).

Ephesians 2:21, 22, uses the same illustration: ‘In whom [Christ] all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.’

Here we perceive how the fruit of the Spirit is reproduced in the context of the church. His divine presence is fruitful in His people, and is of such interpersonal relationship with them, that it makes the church a place of beautiful works, flowing from beautiful lives (reflecting His beauty).

There is a specific goal to this kind of Christ-derived growth of the body: we are becoming ever more like Him. That was always the goal of predestination, as we have seen in Romans 8:28-39, and that goal keeps getting closer and closer, as it presses toward its full achievement in the derived life that the growing body receives from its head. Galatians 4:19

says that Christ is being formed in the members, and Ephesians 4:23 that we are being renewed in the spirit of our mind, 'as the truth is in Jesus' (v. 21). Hence, we as members of his body, put away lying, anger, stealing, ugly talk, bitterness and violence, which are replaced by love (v. 32). Because of this, we become 'kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.' This means that the church is the community of love, as we see in Ephesians 5:25, where Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, and Romans 5:5, where 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.' The transforming beauty of this love of God, abundantly spread out by the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life, makes the church a place of Christ-like love.

Gregory Nazianzus makes this point well:

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for his sake, since he for ours became man. He assumed the worse that he might give us the better; he became poor that we through his poverty might be rich; he took upon him the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; he came down that we might be exalted; he was tempted that we might conquer; he was dishonoured that he might glorify us; he died that he might save us; he ascended that he might draw to himself us who were lying low in the Fall of sin. Let us give all, offer all, to him who gave himself a ransom and a reconciliation for us. But one can give nothing like oneself, understanding the mystery, and becoming for his sake all that he became for ours.¹²

This change transforms us into the beauty for which God intended the human race, as Basil shows.

Only then after a man is purified from the shame whose stain he took, through his wickedness, and has come back again to his natural beauty, and as it were cleaning the royal image and restoring its ancient form, only thus is it possible for him to draw near to the Paraclete. And he, like the sun, will by the aid of thy purified eye show thee in himself the image of the invisible, and in the blessed spectacle of the image thou shalt behold the unspeakable beauty of the archetype. Through his aid hearts are lifted up, the weak are held by the hand, and they who are advancing are brought to

perfection. Shining upon those that are cleansed from every spot, he makes them spiritual by fellowship with himself. Just as when a sunbeam falls on bright and transparent bodies, they themselves become brilliant too, and shed forth a fresh brightness from themselves, so souls wherein the Spirit dwells, illuminated by the Spirit, themselves become spiritual, and send forth their grace to others.¹³

The Unity of the Body

This transforming beauty can occur only in a body which is united within itself, as Paul so often makes clear. ‘For we being many are one bread and one body’ (1 Cor. 10:17); ‘For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body; so also is Christ’ (1 Cor. 12:12); ‘But now are they many members, but one body’ (v. 20). Ephesians 2 shows the bringing together in Christ of both Jew and Gentile: ‘For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us’ (Eph. 2:14). This ‘middle wall of partition’ (*tou phragmou*) refers to the structure of the Temple: ‘In the temple courts a partition wall divided the court of the Gentiles from the court of Israel with an inscription forbidding a Gentile from going further (Josephus, *Ant.* VIII. 3, 2). See the uproar when Paul was accused of taking Trophimus beyond this wall (Acts 21:28).’¹⁴

In Ephesians 4:4, Paul states that ‘There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.’ He exhorts in Colossians 3:15: ‘And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful.’ The peace of God (an attribute of God) is seen in the unity of the body of Christ. So the church is nothing without the Holy Spirit, who makes real the life and virtues of Christ within her.

The real reason why this body cannot be divided is given by means of a question in 1 Corinthians 1:13: ‘Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?’ We may summarize the position: (a) Christ is one, therefore the body is one; (b) The Holy Spirit is one; therefore, the body is one (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13); the Father is one, therefore the body is one (cf. Ephesians 4:4-6: ‘There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through

all, and in you all'). Thus, the whole Godhead embraces and undergirds the oneness of the body.

Clement of Rome early on expressed this insight: 'Have we not one God, and one Christ, and one Spirit of grace poured out upon us? ... for as God lives and as the Lord Jesus Christ lives and the Holy Spirit lives ...'¹⁵ N. T. Wright has worked through the early church's development of Jewish Monotheism in a Christian direction that kept the unity of true Judaism and its renewal after the coming of Christ and the Spirit:

The early Christians faced the same issues, and dealt with them ... they reorganized these themes...around Jesus and the divine Spirit...They thus maintained the Jewish insistence on monotheism over against paganism and dualism, while bringing the unique and striking claim of Judaism to a new focal point: the Creator God had acted specifically and climactically in Jesus, and was now acting through his own Spirit in a new, Jesus-related way.¹⁶

The Holy Spirit communicates to the Christian church a happy sense of the beauty of the Lord. Jonathan Edwards expressed it as follows:

I have many times, had a sense of the glory of the Third Person in the Trinity, and his office as Sanctifier; in his holy operations, communicating divine light and life to the soul. God in the communications of his Holy Spirit, has appeared as an infinite fountain of divine glory and sweetness; being full, and sufficient to fill and satisfy the soul; pouring forth itself in sweet communications; like the sun in its glory, sweetly and pleasantly diffusing light and life. And I have sometimes an affecting sense of the excellency of the word of God as a word of life; as the light of life; a sweet, excellent, life-giving word; accompanied with a thirsting after that word, that it might dwell richly in my heart.¹⁷

Unity in life, and continual seeking of Him characterizes those who are one in this living faith. That is the basis of church unity.

Variety of the Members within the One Body of Christ

We have discussed earlier, rather briefly, the topic of 'spiritual gifts.'¹⁸

That need not be repeated here, but we will call to mind the considerable variety of the members of the body. The body has, for instance, hands, feet, eyes, ears, etc. They all have important functions in the whole body, and even the weakest of them (about which we do not normally speak) are indispensable, and never to be discounted. These varying members of the body are, in their own appropriate ways, gifted for service. This is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12–14, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4.

From these passages, we note that the Spirit sovereignly parcels out gifts to the various members (cf. 1 Cor. 12:11, 28). He does not ask people what they want. Rather, He decides what they shall be given (cf. 1 Cor. 12:5,6). These gifts are for upbuilding the church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:12, 26). These gifts are to bring glory to Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3) as a result of their working in the church. As David Watson has written, these gifts are to be tested in terms of whether they bring glory to the Lord, or whether they are used to elevate the person who claims to possess them; whether they edify the church, or exalt the one using them.¹⁹ Certain verses in 1 Corinthians 12 show Paul dealing with the pride that some believers gave into as they concentrated on the distinction that their giftedness gave them, especially in regard to other church members who did not possess these same gifts (cf. vv. 24-25). The fruit and gifts given to the members of the Church are intended to show what Christ looks like in human flesh, and not to exalt the one through whom they are given.

The Fulfillment of the Covenant in the Body of Christ

Both Old and New Testaments sum up the gracious dealings of God with His people by means of the concept of covenant. From Genesis 3 through Revelation 22, God relates to His fallen people through covenant. The sixty-six books of our Holy Bible are drawn together in two major parts by means of the Covenant or Testament. In Western Christianity, we normally say ‘Old Testament’ and ‘New Testament’ (rather than Old and New Covenant) because of the Latin Vulgate, translated (for the most part) by Jerome. In it, he renders ‘covenant’ as ‘testamentum’, and that has been followed by both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Geerhardus Vos argues convincingly in favor of using ‘covenant’ instead of ‘testament’, and calls it a most felicitous decision: ‘by which [decision]

not merely is the objectionable element of co-equality between God and man eliminated, but the rich positive content of *berith*, as understood by the translators, finds adequate expression ...'²⁰

Elsewhere, I have dealt with Covenant in some detail, and will not repeat it here.²¹ But whether 'covenant' or 'testament', the Church has understood that all the words of Scripture are covenant words from God to His people. Pierre Courthial says it simply: 'Holy Scripture is the covenant treaty in which God determines and delivers the terms to his people.'²²

As we have seen, the one great Covenant of Grace includes all the other biblical covenants: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, David and Palestinian, each contributing in its own way to the grand covenantal scheme. John Murray summarizes the various covenants, which are all part of the one overarching Covenant of Grace, with especial reference to the Covenant with Abraham, as the prototypical covenant, as follows:

The distinctiveness of the sanction and the added solemnity which it involves are correlative with the intimacy and spirituality of the blessing which the covenant imparts. The essence of the blessing is that God will be the God of Abraham and of his seed, the characteristic promise of the Old Testament, 'I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.' In a word, this consists in union and communion with the Lord.²³

This covenant is to its greatest extent fulfilled in Christ's body.

Put in other terms, Christ fulfilled the covenant both from the side of God and from the side of man (in our humanity). The Church shares in the reality of Christ's covenant faithfulness. The Church participates in Christ, not only in the fulness of the Spirit poured out, but also in the perfection of His humanity in which He offered up Himself totally to God as 'a whole burnt offering':

Wherefore holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than was Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house (Heb. 3:1-3);

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through

death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight ... (Col. 1:21, 22).

Thus the church is grounded beyond itself in Christ, which is the background of Christ as head of the body. That is, Christ died for His people and rose for them; they died in Him and rose in Him, and He presents us to the Father in one body, united to Him. Most of this imagery (except for Moses building the house) is not of a lifeless structure, but of a living physical organism that is growing. Indeed, although the new temple is spoken of as made of stones, they are 'living stones' (1 Pet. 2:5).

In both Old and New Testament, they become alive by the Spirit's giving them 'a new heart' (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:10, 11; John 3:3-6). Those who are given new hearts are elected by God to receive it: Genesis 12:1-3 (Abraham); Deuteronomy 7:6-10 (Israel); Ephesians 1:4, 5 (all whom God has elected to be in the Church); Romans 9 and 11 (the remnant of Israel in Chapter 9, and the wild and tame olive trees in chapter 11 – i.e. the Gentiles, who are engrafted into Israel).

In both Old and New Testament, salvation operates through faith. It was the case with Abraham, the Father of the Faithful (as in Genesis 15:6: 'And he (i.e. Abraham) believed the LoRd; and he counted it to him for righteousness'; and Romans 4:3: 'For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.'

Old Testament Israel is the presupposition of the Christian Church

As Romans 11:11-25 explains, the Gentile churches are described theologically as branches of a wild olive tree, which have been cut out and then engrafted into Israel, the domesticated olive tree. In Ephesians 2:13-22, Christ has abolished the enmity between Jew and Gentile, and has made them one man. He has given that new man access by the Spirit to the Father. Thus the foundation of this household of God is the apostles (New Testament) and prophets (Old Testament); together they form one man in Christ.

To refer again to Romans 11, here we have a picture of Israel being cut down to its stock, and the Gentiles (the once wild branches), being grafted in. We notice that the trunk carries the branches. The idea is that the Jew is

first even when God turns towards the Gentiles in order to reprove the Jews. Romans 11:15 speaks of incredible blessing that will come when Israel is reconciled to its true life in the olive tree – ‘God is able to graft them in again’ (v. 23).²⁴

Church Order

The basis of church order in the New Testament largely comes from the Jewish synagogue. It took several years for church and synagogue to become clearly distinguished. We can see this process in the Epistle to Galatians, and especially in Acts 15.

The synagogue appears to have developed especially after the return from captivity in Babylon. Some have traced the immediate origin of its worship to Nehemiah chapters 8 and 9, which speaks of the gathering of the people for worship and reading an exposition of the Law at the Water Gate in Jerusalem. There one finds all the elements of a synagogue service: public prayer and thanksgiving in the congregation (*qahal*). This involved ‘the hearing of the men and women with understanding’; the people saying ‘Amen,’ at the conclusion of prayers and preaching of Scripture from a raised platform of wood by Ezra, which resulted in spiritual experience among the congregation.²⁵

Evidently the captives had met in smaller groups during their captivity, where there was no longer any central temple, and this continued after their return, even when there was a restored temple. Ezekiel seems to imply meetings for worship and instruction during the captivity (cf. Ezek. 8:1; 14:1ff.; 20:1-4, 27-31; 33:30-32).

The synagogue system, with its meetings for worship and preaching under elders, spread not only in Babylon, but throughout the dispersion. *Maccabees* does not mention synagogues being in Israel proper, but throughout the known world at this time, there were synagogues wherever there were Jews. In Theodotian’s LXX revision of *The History of Susanna*, sections 4 to 7 speak of such a meeting in Babylon. By the time of the New Testament and Josephus, there were synagogues all over Israel.

The great historians of Judaism, Vitringa²⁶ and E. Schurer,²⁷ show that according to the rabbis (as in the Talmud), there needed to be a quorum of ten male worshippers to have a synagogue. According to the Talmud (*Berakoth* 6a): ‘Wheresoever Israel prays and studies in its synagogues and

schools, wherever the wise man, the elders and the prophets are, there the Shekinah is also present to bless them.’²⁸

The worship of the Church is certainly related to that of the synagogue. Indeed, some major elements of the synagogue liturgy can be traced back to New Testament times (as through Josephus and Philo): the recitation of the ‘Shema’ (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4:8-13), including Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Numbers 15:37-41. ‘Round this center-point, the rest of the Hebrew liturgy gradually grew up ...’²⁹ Also there was room for free prayer, generally prayed standing with face towards Jerusalem or the Temple. One prayed and the whole congregation said ‘Amen’. Philo, in *De Vita Contemplativa*, mentions the responsive singing of the Psalms by the Essenes. After the reading of law and prophets, there was given an exposition or word of exhortation by some qualified person, either locally or a distinguished visitor (as Jesus in Nazareth, or Paul and Barnabas at Antioch).

Organization of the synagogue

As Douglas Bannerman noted, ‘The synagogue ... was just in name and in reality the “congregation of Israel” localized. The synagogue found its historical governmental continuity with the pre-exilic people of God in the wilderness and promised land by borrowing the ancient institution of the eldership.’³⁰ This structure was as follows:

First, the eldership or presbytery of the synagogue

The authority of the synagogue was in the hands of a small body or consistory of elders. They were either chosen directly by the people (as was usually the case in the Dispersion), or nominated by the Sanhedrin of the nearest town, or the great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, with the concurrence of the congregation (especially in Palestine).³¹ The elder was set apart to office with laying on of hands (when teaching was involved), but no anointing with oil as for priests (cf. Tos. Sanhedr. 1). Three elders were required for ordination. The quorum of the smallest court by which any judicial sentence could be pronounced was three. It was known as ‘the Beth Din’, or ‘house of judgment’, in each Jewish community, and at least one of its members had to be trained in Scripture.

Among the rulers of the synagogue was one known as the ‘legate’ or ‘deputy of the people’ ... who led the congregation in public prayer. His

importance increased as time went on. The leader of the synagogue (or president) was called in Greek ‘*o archisunagogos*’.

Second, the President of the Eldership

In the council or consistory of elders, by which each synagogue was governed, one was appointed president or chairman. He is called ‘head of the session’ or consistory, or in the Hellenistic congregations, the *gerousiarchas*, presiding over the eldership. He was of the same order as the rest of the council, and he could be removed from office. (It is generally thought that this office developed into the Christian bishop).

Third, the Functions of Eldership

There were two classes of elders: teaching and ruling.

(1) Teaching elders

A professional class grew up, known as Scribes (*grammateis*, *nomikoi nomodidaskaloi*). They were versed in Scriptural law and traditional interpretation, as Ezra: ‘A ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LoRd God of Israel had given’ (Ezra 7:6). In Nehemiah 8:1-9, Ezra brings the Scriptures before all the congregation, ‘and gave the sense and caused them to understand the readings.’ Even with the decay of the quality of men in this office, Christ still ascribes value to it, as we see in Matthew 23:2f, 6f.

By New Testament times, the scribes were those among the synagogue eldership specially qualified to speak on religious subjects, and often leading in the synagogue on Sabbath days. They also taught the children.

(2) Ruling Elders

Douglas Bannerman noted that ‘Under the head of “ruling” in the synagogue came the control of everything connected with the arrangements and order of worship in the congregation; the administration of discipline among its members, the management of its financial affairs, and the care of the poor and afflicted in connection with it.’³²

Often synagogue meetings were held on market days when country people brought their wares to town, so they could hear religious discussions, and bring their disputes before the elders. That sort of timing was also observed centuries later by many of the Puritans in England, who

held preachings in grocers' halls on market days in the seventeenth century.³³

Administration of discipline was a part of 'ruling'. In extreme cases it could involve excommunication or 'casting out of the synagogue'. This was the opposite of 'entering into the assembly of the Lord' in the Old Testament, as in Deuteronomy 23:2ff (and see John 12:42; 16:1f). Sometimes this involved civil fines and penalties, although as Roman power increased, the power of the synagogue shrank to that of moral influence, which still exercised much sway in society at that time.

Relationships of the synagogues to each other

There were two different situations for synagogues: first, one in a district by itself, and secondly, several congregations in a city or populous area. While isolated synagogues managed their own affairs, when there were a number of them in proximity, there was a collective eldership, forming a *gerousia* or *presbuterion* of the city or district, bearing a certain oversight over all the congregations.

E. Schurer in the nineteenth century did an important study on the Presbyterian type of organization of synagogues at Rome (*Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom*). According to his research, the various congregations at Rome had sessions and moderators, whereas the Jews at Alexandria had a city-wide presbytery. Perhaps this was owing to the earlier, more dominant position of the Jews at Alexandria.

Where there was a *presbuterion* or *gerousia*, it was run by an executive committee made up of *archontes*. The election of archons usually took place annually around the Day of Atonement.

The Great Sanhedrin at Jerusalem

The term 'Sanhedrin' is derived from the Greek word: *sun-edrion* (*a sitting together* or *council*). Perhaps it arose during the Macedonian period. Josephus first mentions it in connection with the reign of Antiochus III (223–187 B.C.). Probably it existed already under the Ptolemies (301–218 B.C.).

A council of elders or presbytery (*gerousia*) at Jerusalem is mentioned three times in Judith, and often in I and II Maccabees. It is often referred to in the New Testament as an important body of priests, scribes, and elders of

the people, under the presidency of the high priest. It is sometimes designated 'the Presbytery of the people' (*to presbuterion tou laou*), cf. Matthew 26:59; Mark 14:55; Acts 22:5; 5:21.

It was composed of three elements: chief priests (past and present), and perhaps the heads of the twenty-four priestly courses; scribes, or professional teachers of the law; the elders – leading men from the eldership of various synagogues in Israel, and possibly elsewhere. It had seventy-one members (harking back to Moses and the seventy elders). This was the supreme court of Church and people, and under it were subordinate courts with less authority. Every town with more than one hundred and twenty Jewish heads of houses had the right to establish a Sanhedrin. However, much is unclear about its details. Selden, in his three volumes of *De Synodis Hebraeorum*, is considered to be over confident in some of his explanations of its working.

General Results of the Synagogue System in its relation to the developing Church

Douglas Bannerman has pointed out six results of the structure of the synagogue for the church:³⁴

(1) A transition from the symbolical in worship to the direct. That is, the elaborate ceremonies of the Temple were replaced by the hearing of the Word, and instead of blood sacrifice, the focus was on the prayers of the people, cf. Luke 1:10; Acts 3:3.

(2) A transition from the local and national to the universal.

(3) The central place in the sphere of worship was given to the written revelation of God's grace and His will for men: to the Holy Scriptures.

(4) The rights and duties of all individual members in the congregation were strongly emphasized.

(5) A simple, but strong and elastic organization of a Presbyterian and representative kind was developed and brought into practical operation in every part of the civilized world.

(6) The collective unity of the religious fellowship of Israel was more clearly brought out both in idea and in practical development.

Government of the Church

Rooted in the Old Testament

Central to the Old Testament church government are elders, who exercised both civil and religious functions. Even before Moses, there were elders as part of the patriarchal system, as in Exodus 3:16, 18, but elders especially were connected with the organization of the people during the Mosaic period. The elders represented the people and took God's Word to them (Exod. 19:7; 24:1, 2). In Leviticus 4:15, the elders laid hands on the bullock to be killed (cf. 1 Kings 8:1-3). The eldership too had special significance in Exodus 18:13ff and Numbers 11:16,17. The elders served to adjudicate local controversies, as in Deuteronomy 22:15ff.

In addition to individual elders, the Old Testament speaks at times of something equivalent to a council of elders called: 'elders of the congregation' (cf. Lev. 4:15; Judg. 21:16). In the LXX this council is called *Gerousia* or 'presbytery', and *presbuteroi* (the elders, as a body).

Developed in the New Testament

The New Testament makes it clear that Christ is the head of the body (cf. Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:10, 22-23; John 15:1-8; Col. 1:18). He exercises rule over his church through officers (Eph. 4:4-16). Romans 12:8 speaks of rulership and 1 Corinthians 12:28 speaks of governments; these are gifts to perfect the church. More specifically, it is expanded in Matthew 16:15-19:

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The immediate context shows that Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, was a divine revelation to Peter (not given by flesh and blood). Christ then states: 'Thou art Peter and on this rock I will build my church.' Peter, who just confessed Christ, is the foundation of

the church, and this fits with the statement in Ephesians 2:20: 'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone ...'

When Jesus says that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it', He is obviously including the malign powers of guilt, death and hell. The picture is not so much that of the church fighting back evil powers, but rather the church moving out against its enemies, and taking them over. That is the picture in Genesis 22:17, 18: '... That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.'

The brother of Rebekah (Laban) and her father (Bethuel) put this blessing upon her, as she chose to go with Eleazar, to become the wife of Isaac: 'And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them' (Gen. 24:60). That is, the people of God shall not cower before those who come against them, but instead will take over their gates and cities.

In promising confessing Peter 'the keys of the kingdom', it was given in the context of further blessing. These keys were given to be used in the work of 'binding and loosing'. In the rabbinical background of these terms, they often meant by 'binding' to declare something forbidden, and by 'loosing' to declare something permitted, especially as used in the school of Hillel. Taken that way, it would primarily refer to the making of moral judgments by the church authorities (as by Peter at Joppa on clean and unclean animals – and persons – cf. Acts 10:9-18).

But this is not the deeper explanation of the meaning, for, as in John 20:22, 23, it referred to the forgiving and retention of sins: 'And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.' And John 20:21, 22, shows that this power of binding and loosing sins is not given just to Peter but to all the disciples.

John Calvin stated that this act of binding and loosing is ministerial, in the sense of declaratory (i.e. declaring the Gospel of forgiveness), and that because of our sin, it is a needed continuing ministry:

To impart to us this benefit, the keys of the church have been given. When Christ gave the command to the apostles and conferred upon them the power to forgive sins [Matt. 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23], he did not so much desire that the apostles absolve from sins those who might be converted from ungodliness to the faith of Christ, as that they should perpetually discharge this office among believers. Paul teaches this when he writes that the mission of reconciliation had been entrusted to the ministers of the church and that by it they are repeatedly to exhort the people to be reconciled to God in Christ's name [II Cor. 5:18, 20]. Therefore, in the communion of saints, our sins are continually forgiven us by the ministry of the church itself when the presbyters or bishops to whom this office has been committed strengthened godly consciences by the gospel promises in the hope of pardon and forgiveness. This they do both publicly and privately as need requires.³⁵

The New Testament Channel of Authority

First, Christ is the head of the body, as we have seen in some detail. We can summarize this in the words of John Calvin, with close reference to Cyprian: 'Cyprian, also following Paul, derives the source of concord of the entire church from Christ's episcopate alone.' Calvin continues:

'The church is one, which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun but one light, and many branches of a tree, but one strong trunk grounded in its tenacious root, and since from one spring flow many streams, although a goodly number seem outpoured from their bounty and superabundance, still, at the source unity abides. Take a ray from the body of the sun; its unity undergoes no division. Break a branch from a tree; the severed branch cannot sprout. Cut off a stream from its source; cut off, it dries up. So also the church, bathed in the light of the Lord, extends over the whole earth; yet there is one light diffused everywhere' [Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church* V]. Nothing more fitting could be said to express this indivisible connection which all members of Christ have with one another. We see how he continually calls us back to the Head himself. Accordingly, Cyprian declares that heresies and schisms arise because men return not to the source of truth, seek not the Head, keep not the teaching of the Heavenly Master.³⁶

Second, there is the unique authority of the apostolate. Ridderbos in *When the Time had Fully Come* spoke of the apostolic institution as ‘the canonicity which Jesus Christ himself confirmed on his apostles’.³⁷ Christ spoke to Peter in this manner in Matthew 16:18,19:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

He gave particular authority to the seventy He sent out in His name to heal the sick and to preach the kingdom, and to overcome demons (cf. Luke 10:1-20).

On the evening of His resurrection He breathed on them the Holy Spirit and sent them out, as the Father had sent Him (cf. John 20:21-22). In John 14:26, he promised them the Holy Ghost: ‘whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you.’ This is expanded in John 16:7-16:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore, said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.

Acts 1:1 and 2 shows that after Christ’s ascension, He sent down the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. To them He gave His

commandments (revealed His will). The great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, shows Paul declaring what he had received:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...(1Cor.15:1-3).

Ephesians 2:20 exhibits the household of God as ‘... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone....’ Hebrews 2:3, 4 puts the apostles in such a high category that to reject them is ‘to neglect so great salvation’. The Lord began speaking, and the apostles were used to confirm it (Heb. 2:3). Jude 3 calls on the saints ‘to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’. That is, what God gave them was of such value that they must give their all to maintain it: that demonstrates the immense authority of the apostolic truth.

We may summarize the apostolic authority with John Murray that when they spoke, the Lord spoke, that is, their writings had dominical authority.³⁸ This apostolic authority was unique in time: after the completion of the canon of the New Testament, there is no evidence to think that when men spoke and wrote it was inspired Scripture. We can therefore say that the Headship of Christ continues, but the apostolate is fulfilled.

Third, there is the eldership given to the church. The apostles ordained elders in the churches. Since the apostolate was not permanent, and since the New Testament gives no other provision for the government of the local church than elders, then we must assume that government by the eldership is the continuing form of church government intended by the New Testament.

New Testament eldership grew out of Old Testament eldership, and was no doubt influenced by the way eldership had developed in the synagogue. Titus was left in Crete ‘to set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee ...’ (Titus 1:5). Paul met the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:17) and warned them (in v. 28): ‘Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which he

hath purchased with his blood.’ In like fashion, Peter instructs the elders as under-shepherds to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:1,2).

1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of all elders as ‘ruling’, but adds a distinction, in that in addition to ruling, some labored in the word and doctrine: ‘Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.’ It would appear that these were not two totally different classes of leaders, but that some of them had a particular responsibility in teaching. This was not unlike the synagogue eldership, composed of scribes (learned in the law), and respected heads of family (or as we would say, ‘lay elders’). It seems to imply that among the elders, all of whom ruled together, some were specially gifted to teach.

The New Testament sets forth the duties of elders in a few passages. In Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2, they are to act as shepherds of the church of God. In so doing, they exercised oversight (as ‘bishops’ or ‘overseers’ – cf. Acts 20:28). A careful study of the pertinent texts in the New Testament indicates that ‘elder’ and ‘bishop’ refers to the same persons (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Tim. 3:1). ‘Elder’ refers to the person (implying a certain maturity), while ‘bishop’ refers to the task: oversight.

Their oversight necessarily involved them in exercising ‘government.’ As John Murray has noted (with reference to 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:1f.; 1 Pet. 5:3; and Hebrews 13:7): ‘Since this is an integral function of the office, we are compelled to identify the ruling of Romans 12:8 and the government of 1 Corinthians 12:28 with this office; in the particular administration of the church, and it would not be possible to think of two distinct governing agencies.’³⁹

Elders act as stewards of God (Titus 1:7): administering God’s property (especially, the saints as God’s heritage). They are to exhort and teach (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9). They are to be examples of Christlike humility and service (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Originally, elders seem to have been appointed by the apostles (or ‘apostolic men’). For instance, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23); and Paul told Titus to do so in Crete (Titus 1:5). Titus and Timothy had been given the qualifications for the office of elder (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). It is assumed that the churches (as did the synagogues before them) would have recognized those set apart as elders (cf. Heb. 13:7; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1).

The question arises: who appointed elders after the apostles were gone from the scene? Probably it was the eldership itself who did this, since they

had the oversight of the flock, and according to 2 Timothy 2:2, Timothy was to prepare faithful men who could teach others to take their places. Even more specifically, however, 1 Timothy 4:14 speaks of the presbytery laying its hands on Timothy. The presbytery is definitely a body of elders.

However, there were other offices in the New Testament Church. From the perspective of history, we can think of them in two ways: temporary (or extraordinary) and permanent. All offices depended on endowment by the Holy Spirit. As for temporary offices, we note that the apostolate ceased when Christ ceased giving the specific gifts to them. These apostles had all seen the risen Lord, and ‘had been with him from the beginning’ (John 15:27); ‘Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of the resurrection’ (Acts 1:21,22).

They were given the power to perform miracles to attest their ministries (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4) and they wrote inspired Scripture (Acts 15:28; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 5:9-12). In addition to the office of apostle are mentioned prophets and evangelists. It is possible to consider ‘prophets’ either as temporary or continuing. They are mentioned frequently (Acts 11:28; 13:1,2; 15:32; 1 Cor. 12:10; 13:2; 14:3; Eph. 2:20; 3:5; 4:11; 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; Rev. 11:3). We could say that the office is permanent in the sense that prophesying as explaining and applying the Word goes on in the Church to the end of time. But one could also say that the office of gospel writer and/or prophet was temporary in the sense that the miraculous power of prophecy seems to have ceased sometime around the close of the apostolic age.

‘Evangelists’ are mentioned in Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11, and in 2 Timothy 4:5. Whether it was a separate office is unclear. It may well have been included under the preaching of elders and was included in regular ministry of the church leadership, where they are exhorted ‘to do the work of an evangelist’ (2 Tim. 4:5) – in other words, to preach the gospel.

There is also the office of deacon, which is certainly permanent in the church. While ‘deacon’ means ‘servant’, it is used in the New Testament in a more specific sense, referring to an office in the church (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 12). 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 speaks of ‘serving as deacon’. Acts 6:1-6 speaks of the appointment of seven deacons, whose practical service was to set the elders free to labor in word and prayer.

Very high qualifications were required for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, very close morally and spiritually to those required of elders:

Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling their children, and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Connectional church government

The local congregation is the primary manifestation of the visible church of Christ. Both in the synagogue and in the New Testament Church, the presbytery is primarily the elders gathered to fulfill their office. Yet there is a broader connection and fellowship beyond the local congregation; it is an aspect of the oneness of the body of Christ. This oneness was expressed governmentally in the church, somewhat like the structure of the synagogue.

The various local congregations were represented by elders, and the elders from different locations came together in a broader court, which had authority over the whole church. This was known as the General Assembly, as we see in Acts 15. What the apostles decided there was binding on the whole church. The church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and elders over the question of circumcision. Paul and Silas on their second missionary journey, as they went through the cities, 'delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem' (Acts 16:4).

The New Testament leaves a great deal of latitude in precisely how this connectional government among the churches shall be expressed. Considerable variations have been operative in different ages and different cultures across the world. However, some type of representative or Presbyterian government does seem to be expressed in both Old and New Testaments, and it has been worked out in multifarious ways across the centuries, and its flexibility has meant that it could take root and flourish in very different settings.

Hierarchal developments in the Middle Ages

In the New Testament itself, ‘elder’ (‘presbyter’) and ‘bishop’ (overseer) are generally interchangeable. John Calvin makes the point of the interchangeability of elder and bishop:

But in indiscriminately calling those who rule the church ‘bishops,’ ‘presbyters,’ ‘pastors,’ and ‘ministers,’ I did so according to Scriptural usage, which interchanges these terms. For to all who carry out the ministry of the Word, it accords the title of ‘bishops.’ So in Paul, when he has bidden Titus to appoint presbyters for each town [Titus 1:5], there follow immediately, ‘for a bishop ... must be blameless’ [Titus 1:7; cf. I Tim. 3:1], etc. Elsewhere he greets a number of bishops in one church [Phil. 1:1]. And in The Acts, it is related that he convened the Ephesian presbyters [Acts 20:17], whom he calls ‘bishops’ in his speech [Acts 20:28].⁴⁰

Jerome wrote in his comments on Titus that:

Bishop and presbyter are one and the same. And before, by the devil’s prompting, dissensions arose in religion and it was said among the people, ‘I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas’ [I Cor. 1:12; cf. Ch. 3:4], churches were governed by the common counsel of presbyters, therefore, know that they are, according to the custom of the church, subject to him who presides, so the bishops recognize that they are superior to the presbyters more according to the custom of the church than by the Lord’s actual arrangement and that they ought to govern the church in co-operation with them.⁴¹

Calvin, among most historians of the church, notes that there was a development by the time of the Council of Nicaea (325):

That each province had one archbishop among the bishops, and that at the Council of Nicaea patriarchs were ordained to be higher in rank and dignity than archbishops, were facts connected with the maintenance of discipline....Some called the government thus constituted a ‘hierarchy’, an improper term (it seems to me), certainly one unused in Scripture But if, laying aside the word, we look at the thing itself, we shall find that the

ancient bishops did not intend to fashion any other form of church rule than that which God has laid down in his Word.⁴²

Calvin shows that the people still had the right to choose (or vote on) their clergy:

However, for the presbyters also agreement of the citizens was always required. This is attested by Canon I, Dist. 67 attributed to Anacletus. Finally, all ordinations took place at stated times of the year, in order that no one might creep in secretly without the consent of the believers, or be too readily promoted without witnesses.⁴³

Calvin then argues that it was a few hundred years before the Bishop of Rome was recognized the 'primate' among the patriarchs of all churches.⁴⁴

As to the antiquity of the primacy of the Roman see, there is nothing pertaining to its establishment earlier than that decree of the Council of Nicaea, in which first place among the patriarchs was granted to the Roman bishop, and he was ordered to take care of the suburban churches. When the council made such a division between him and the other patriarchs as to assign to each his own boundaries, surely it did not establish him as head of all, but made him one of the chiefs.⁴⁵

Calvin argues that it was not until the time of Gregory 1 (sixth century) that '... contention arose over the title of "universal bishop".'⁴⁶ Instead, 'All the ancient councils order bishops to be ordained by their metropolitans; nowhere do they order the Roman bishop to do this except in his own patriarchate We see therefore how far the Roman pontiff then was from that supreme dominion which he declares to have been given him by Christ over all churches, and which he falsely asserts that he held in all ages by the consent of the whole world.'⁴⁷

Historically, it is not hard to understand how this happened. With the breakdown of the mighty Roman Empire, Christian bishops in the West gradually became centers of protection, government and power, as did the monasteries under them. As Calvin wrote:

By Gregory's time [6th c.] that ancient method was already much changed. For the Empire was shaken and torn apart, the provinces of Gaul and Spain

were stricken with repeated calamities. Illyricum laid waste, Italy harried. Africa almost destroyed by continual disasters. In order that, amid such chaotic political conditions, the faith might remain whole, or surely might not perish, all bishops on every side allied themselves more closely to the Roman pontiff. This resulted in the marked increase, not only of the prestige of the see but also of its power; I do not, however, care so much about the reasons why it happened. It is at least evident that the power of the Roman see was greater than in previous ages. And yet it differed greatly from an unbridled domination in which one man could command others according to his pleasure Besides, he speaks there of the Byzantine primate who, after being condemned by a provincial synod, repudiated the whole decision. His colleagues reported this stubbornness of his to the emperor. The emperor directed Gregory to act as judge. We see, then, that Gregory is attempting nothing that violates ordinary jurisdiction, and what he does to help others, he only does at the emperor's command.⁴⁸

By the late eleventh century, the popes had reached a point of religious and political domination. Margaret Deanesly writes:

Thus when Gregory VII, the greatest of the early medieval popes, was elected to the papal throne in 1073, Rome was already reformed and powerful [through her taking leadership of the Cluniac movement] She had freed herself from the power of the Roman nobles. She had asserted her jurisdiction over the metropolitans, her supremacy over councils....The medieval papacy had reached maturity.⁴⁹

She adds, concerning the greatest development of papal power, by the early thirteenth century:

The pontificate of Innocent III, 1198–1221, may be taken as the most splendid period in the history of the medieval papacy. Gregory VII, Innocent III, and Boniface VIII stand out as the three popes who stated most clearly the claims of the papacy both in spiritual matters and secular ... Innocent III ... like Gregory VII, he found that temporal power was needed to achieve spiritual reform, and he was more successful than any other pope in attaining it Innocent stated the claims of the spiritual power to supremacy over the temporal in famous and unfaltering language. 'The sacerdotium is the sun, the regnum is the moon. Kings rule over their

respective kingdoms, but Peter rules over the whole earth. The sacerdotium came by divine creation, the regnum by man's cunning As much as the soul is worthier than the body, so much worthier is the priesthood than the monarchy.'⁵⁰

Calvin spends much time discussing the corruption and apostasy of the Medieval Church, especially in its later phases.⁵¹ He wisely concludes: 'The power of the church, therefore, is not infinite but subject to the Lord's Word and, as it were enclosed within it.'⁵² He goes on to add: 'Therefore, holy men of old knew God only by beholding him in his Son as in a mirror (cf. II Cor. 3:18). When I say this, I mean that God has never manifested himself to men in any other way than through the Son, that is, his sole wisdom, light, and truth.'⁵³

Yet because of the political and military disorders of the early and middle ages, the bishops, and particularly the pope of Rome, became protectors throughout a great deal of Western Europe. Calvin notes: 'Sometime later, when cities and regions were occasionally oppressed by various difficulties, they betook themselves to the bishops for protection, to be shielded by their faithfulness. These men with marvelous subtlety turned themselves from protectors into lords.'⁵⁴ He further says: 'At last, the Roman pontiff, not content with modest baronies, first laid his hands on kingdoms, then upon the Empire itself.'⁵⁵

Thus, the bishops grew power in an already hierarchical society. Avery Dulles explains: 'A historical study of the development of Christian ministry would probably show that the Church in every age has adjusted its structures and offices so as to operate more effectively in the social environment in which it finds itself. In a class society, the Church tends to become more hierarchical and aristocratic; bishops appear as princes of the Church ...'⁵⁶

Service of the Bishops

Dumitru Staniloae notes that the original apostles do not have direct successors.⁵⁷ Yet, he adds: 'According to Saint Ignatius, they follow the apostles "as Christ follows the Father," continuing the apostles' work. According to Clement of Rome, the apostles, by "preaching through the countries and cities ... appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having

first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe ...’⁵⁸

Staniloae describes this as a kind of spiritual leadership: ‘Leadership as shepherding souls toward salvation is always a service; it has a spiritual character, because it comes from the Holy Spirit ... it seeks nothing but the salvation of the faithful, or to place them in an eternal loving relationship with Christ and with each other.’⁵⁹

Because the risen Christ is always in His church: ‘... because he abides in the faithful, holiness, salvation, and the eternal divine life are communicated to them. Holiness is communicated from his body through his Holy Spirit. Through his pneumatized body his holiness is being endlessly communicated to us in the church, as is the power to become ever holier, ever more open to God’s purity and eternal love, and free of any egoism that is opposed to holiness.’⁶⁰

He shines through the Church

Staniloae writes: ‘This “righteousness” shines forth from the body of Christ in all those who cleave to him through faith and who use the power that comes from faith to become after his image: “The Lord’s deified body, placed in a state of righteousness, glorified, resurrected, and raised up to heaven, is communicated through the sacred mysteries and remains forever present and alive in creation through the Spirit, and as such is called Church ...”’⁶¹

Staniloae elsewhere employs a striking image – that of magnetism – as drawing believers to self-sacrifice: ‘Christ’s power shines forth from his sacrifice like a magnetic power, drawing us also to our sacrifice. *Thus our self-sacrifice is full of Christ’s self-sacrifice* [quoting Cyril of Alexandria, *Adoration in Spirit and Truth*, Book 10].’⁶² Thus through the Spirit’s motivating and empowering the Christians to deny self so as to lift up Christ, what Jesus requires in the Sermon on the Mount is demonstrated: ‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven’ (Matt. 5:16).

This shining occurs through the Church, which is inhabited by the risen Lord, who by His nature as light, shines out ‘... the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power [God] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the

head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:19, 22, 23).

God's glory filled the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:34), and the Temple that Solomon built (1 Kings 8:11). God's glory cloud filled the Temple at the time of the call of Isaiah (Isa. 6:3). In John 1:14 we are told of Christ, that 'The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.' Then, through Christ's continuing gracious presence, there is glory in the church (Rom. 15:7 and Eph. 3:21).

The wonder of being in the church is that we thereby shine out with this same glory that raised Christ from the dead. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

1. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, p. 7.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. I. 4.

3. See for instance, *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1967), 'Notes' on Genesis 1:28, p. 4.

4. Kittel, *op. cit.*, III, p. 524.

5. John Murray, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 322.

6. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, p. 517.

7. *The Documents of Vatican II* by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. America Press, 1966.

8. Elsewhere, I have noted that: '... *typology* (as used by the Church Fathers), in discovering an analogy between events or persons in the Old and New Testaments, points out that the same operation of God's providence is displayed in the Old Testament *type* and the New Testament *antitype* (or *archetype*). Paul does this in 1 Corinthians 10, where he sees a typological analogy between the baptism of the children of Israel in the sea to Moses (vv. 1, 2) and baptism unto Christ. The author of Hebrews draws a typological connection between the Old Testament tabernacle and the human nature of Christ, thus explaining the one by the other. *Allegory*, however, speaks of one thing in terms of its meaning with something else, with very little control over the derivation of its meaning, and at times very little concern for the reality or historicity of that which is allegorized ...' (Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2, p.52).

9. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982), p. 221.

10. Calvin, *Institutes* II. XVI. 5.

11. John Murray, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 360.

12. Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration I*, V.
13. Basil, *On the Spirit*, IX, p. 23.
14. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, IV. *The Epistles of Paul*, p. 527.
15. Clement of Rome, *I Clement* 46:6; 58:2.
16. N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 457.
17. Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, vol. I (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. xlvii.
18. See pp. 88ff.
19. See David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 112-14.
20. Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.: Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1980), p. 404.
21. See Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, Chapter 6, pp. 387-446.
22. Pierre Courthial, *Le Jour des Petits Recommencements: Essai sur l'Actualité de la Parole (Évangile-Loi) de Dieu* (translated into English by Matthew Miller), p. 213.
23. John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, pp. 16, 17.
24. Cf. Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), chapters 3 and 4.
25. See Douglas Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, chapter 3, which makes reference to Edersheim's *Life and Time of Jesus the Messiah*, and E. Schurer's *A History of the Jewish People*, II/2.
26. See his *De Synagoga Vetere Libri Tres – 1685*.
27. Schurer, op. cit., p. 74.
28. D. Bannerman, op. cit., p. 130.
29. Ibid., p. 131.
30. Ibid.
31. Cf. codex Berakoth f. 55 a – 'Rabbi Isaac says: They appoint no one as a shepherd over any congregation without first consulting it.'
32. D. Bannerman, op. cit., p. 144.
33. See Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (Schocken Books: New York, 1967), *passim*.
34. D. Bannerman, op. cit., pp. 155-162.
35. John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. I. 22.
36. Ibid., IV. II, p. 6.
37. Herman N. Ridderbos, *When the Time had Fully Come* (Grand Rapids, 1957), p. 187.
38. John Murray, *The Infallible Word*, 'The divine attestation of Scripture' (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), pp. 36-38.
39. Murray, *Works*, vol. 2:259.
40. John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. III. 8.
41. Jerome, *Letters* cxlvi, quoted in Calvin, op. cit. IV. IV. 1.
42. Calvin, op. cit., IV. IV. 3.
43. Calvin, op. cit., IV. IV. 12.
44. See Calvin, op. cit., IV. VII.
45. Ibid., IV. VII. 1.

46. Ibid., IV. VII. 4.
47. Ibid. IV. VII. 4, 5, 10.
48. Ibid., IV. VII. 12.
49. Margaret Deanesly, *A History of the Medieval Church 590–1500* (Methuen & Co.: London, 1969), p. 91.
50. Ibid., pp. 140, 141.
51. Calvin, op. cit., IV. VIII. VII and VIII.
52. Ibid., IV. VIII. 4.
53. Ibid., IV, VIII. 5.
54. Ibid., IV. XI. 10.
55. Ibid.
56. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Image Books: Doubleday and Company, Inc.: Garden City, New York, 1978), p. 162.
57. Staniloae, op. cit., p. 41.
58. Ibid., p. 41.
59. Ibid., p. 50.
60. Ibid., p. 70.
61. Ibid., p. 126, quoting Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, pp. 125-26.
62. Staniloae, op. cit., p. 37.

CHAPTER 9

ATTRIBUTES AND MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The entire world finds its highest significance in the Church. This Church has been described across the ages in terms of attributes (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic); and, later, of marks (true preaching of the Word, right administration of the sacraments, and proper discipline). The Church is in union with Christ, and that spiritual reality is demonstrated to us in the signs and seals of the covenant of grace, namely, the sacraments. There have been very differing, and even contradictory, concepts of the meaning of the sacraments throughout the long history of the Church. We look at some of them here. Many in the sixteenth-century Reformation pointed out that ‘sign and seal’ are not the same as the reality to which they point. But ‘God’s sacramental action’ effectively operates through them. When we affirm that Christ is present ‘spiritually’ in the sacraments, we must remember that the ‘spiritual’ is not of less power than the physical, but the contrary is the case. When the Word is added to the element, it becomes a sacrament.

If, as we have already mentioned, the late second-century text, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, contends that ‘The world exists for the Church’, then the eternal significance of the church outweighs that of the world itself. It is essential then for us to understand what the church is.

One of the first attempts by the church to address that question can be found in the Nicene Creed (fourth century), which expresses belief in the Church (*ecclesiam*) as having four attributes: *ūnam*, *sanctam*, *catholicam*, and *apostolicam*. We will start our study here.

Attributes of the Church

Unam

First, unity (*unam*). The figure used in the New Testament of *the body of Christ* implies the unity of a normal body. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:12-25:

For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member but many....But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members yet one body ... (vv. 12-13, 19-20).

In similar fashion, Ephesians 4:4-16 speaks of this unity of many members into one: 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all ...' (vv. 4-6). Calvin comments:

But a community is affirmed, such as Luke describes, in which the heart and soul of the multitude of believers are one [Acts 4:32], and such as Paul has in mind when he urges the Ephesians to be 'one body and one Spirit', just as 'they were called in one hope' [Eph. 4:4]. If truly convinced that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another.¹

This unity of the true Church is a unity of life with Christ, which is the essence of salvation. Staniloae explains:

Unity belongs to the Church's constitution as the incarnate Word's extended body. For the Lord became incarnate, was crucified, and rose from the dead as a man in order to gather in himself those divided, to gather them in the infinity of his love for the Father and of the Father's love for him Christ extends himself in us through his sacrificed and risen body, so that he may unite us and make us like himself ²

Yet realistically, the world sees much disunity within the Church. As Bavinck wrote: 'We cannot be humble enough as Christians about the disruptions and discord that have existed in the church of Christ through all

ages; it is a sin against God, in conflict with the prayer of Christ, and caused by the darkness of our mind and lack of love in our heart.’³

Berkouwer has spoken of this division of the church into various denominations as ‘pluriformity’ of the Church, as a way of witnessing to a certain underlying oneness.⁴ Beyond the great East-West Schism of 1054, the rift between Roman Catholic and Protestant may be the greatest disruption the Church has experienced, dating to the sixteenth-century Reformation. Yet even at the height of this fierce controversy, Calvin admitted that there were *vestigia* of the true Church in the Roman Church:

However, when we categorically deny to the papists the title of *the church*, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them In them Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out To sum up, I call them churches to the extent that the Lord wonderfully preserves in them a remnant of his people ...⁵

And in Calvin’s *Letter to Sadoleto*, while he denies the title of church to Rome, he affirms that baptism still exists among them.

Salvation of Believers in opposing denominations

Since the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholicism has admitted that the Protestants, in spite of their schism, are still ‘separated brethren’. Avery Dulles brings out that *Lumen Gentium* (of Vatican II) allows them, from ‘a spiritual or mystical standpoint’ ‘... [to be] realized less, equally, or more in a Church separated from Rome than in a Church in communion with Rome’.⁶

From the Eastern Orthodox point of view, it is not denied that believers outside their communion may be saved. So Staniloae writes:

But the present situation of ecclesial incompleteness within the various denominations, the question is raised: Are their members saved? Or, in other words, is there salvation outside the Church, which is nothing other than *one*, in the full sense of the word? This question cannot be given a simplistic answer. Within the different Christian confessions, there are many believers whose Christian life has not been reduced to their particular denomination’s official doctrinal formulas. The ancient Christian tradition was stronger than the doctrinal innovations brought about by the founders

of these denominations and sustained officially until now by these formations and their theologians ... the believers of various denominations found themselves inadvertently within those denominations that have faith in a Christ who is not present in them with his entire saving efficacy. Their incomplete participation in Christ – and this is, to a great extent, not their fault – may consequently result in an incomplete participation in Him in the life to come as well, in conformity with the word of the Savior: ‘In my Father’s house are many mansions’ (John 14:2).⁷

Most traditional Protestants would probably be fairly close to the affirmation given in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Chapter XXV, I): ‘The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.’

The particular churches in the one great Church are ‘more or less pure’ (par. IV). This paragraph defines the issue of purity as: ‘according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.’

Hence, Protestants have not made church government a defining issue in determination of a true church, and that, along with differing understandings of sacraments, are what has largely divided them from the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation. They definitely admit the presence of salvation in churches where Christ is somehow set forth, and the Scriptures, to some degree, preached. Although fiercely critical of Roman Catholicism, Calvin puts the Greek (Orthodox) in a somewhat different category. He defends them against the Roman Catholic Church’s writing them off as schismatics:

But what if I confront them with Greece? I therefore ask them once more why they say that the church perished among the Greeks, among whom the succession of bishops (in their opinion the sole custodian and preserver of the church) has never been interrupted. They make the Greeks schismatics; with what right? Because in withdrawing from the apostolic see, they lost their privilege. What? Would not they who fall away from Christ deserve to lose it much more? It therefore follows that this pretense of succession is

vain unless their descendants conserve safe and uncorrupted the truth of Christ which they have received at their fathers' hands, and abide in it.⁸

Although very critical of Roman Catholicism (and by implication, Eastern Orthodoxy), they have not denied that people in those bodies may be united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. That is, God may certainly have His elect in ecclesiastical bodies that are in serious ways out of line with Scripture. Many of these people have had no other option, through no fault of their own.

Sanctam

Because the church belongs to its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, it is holy. Here we see a tension between what C.H. Dodd called 'the already and not yet'. On the one hand, the Church is already holy: 'The holiness of the Church is seen as a matter of faith, attributable to the presence in it of the Holy Spirit.'⁹ Yet on the other hand, the Church is a pilgrim, moving on by God's grace to her full holiness in the eschaton. Thus, she has not reached that place where she can fully be described as 'a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27). But that glad day will come, when it is presented to the Lord in the final glory (Eph. 5:27a).

The true members of the Church are taught not to deny that they commit sins (1 John 1:10), but to seek to avoid doing so, and when they do sin, to confess it in the name and merits of Jesus (1 John 2:1, 2). Thus, they have not yet reached sinless perfection in themselves. But through the continuing grace of God in Christ, they are on the way.

Staniloae describes clearly this struggle for holiness that will eventually be victorious for the true believer:

As an attribute of the Church and of her members through participation, holiness first of all consists of purification from sins and of the power to remain holy and to advance in a life of virtues; this is none other than the positive and progressive expression of purity and love. In purity all the aspects of spiritual perfection are included: abstinence, moderation, patience, wisdom, humility, meekness, goodness in thoughts and deeds, and love for all. It is readiness for communion with God through prayer, and

with our fellow human beings in prayer for them and in mutual help. The Church and her members have all these aspects of holiness.¹⁰

This holiness is rooted in Christ, and from Him it flows to His Church in and through the Holy Spirit. The Church believes in Him, and thereby looks to Him for the totality of her life, including holiness. Hebrews 12:2 is true of her members: 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

Dulles is correct that the depths of this holiness within God's people cannot always be discerned by the human eye: '... nor an external holiness capable of being statistically measured, but primarily the lived holiness of an interior communion with God, pouring over into communion with one's fellow men It can at most be surmised by men.'¹¹

Catholicam

The word 'Catholic' is not applied to the Church in the New Testament, but the concept of 'universal' is there in connection with the Church. Mark 16:15 certainly implies it in the call to preach the gospel to every creature in the world: 'And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' Revelation 5:9 plainly expresses its meaning: 'And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.'

That is, the Church has never been nationally limited. 'Catholic' basically means 'according to the whole' (*kata holon*). Even before the Council of Nicaea in 325, the term was used by Cyprian, nearly a century earlier.¹² Professor Pierre Courthial (of the Reformed Seminary at Aix-en-Provence) explained the basic meaning of 'catholic':

Catholic does not refer simply and primarily to spatial and temporal universality. This expression refers above all to the confession by the Church of God of the integrality of the scriptural truth. For the Greek word *katholikos*, which signifies literally 'according to the whole', speaks above everything else to a qualitative totality: 'according to the whole of normative revelation', which is for the Church the Holy Scriptures.

To be *catholic* is to respect the inseparable whole of the text of Scripture, in the adoration of the One who is its primary and sovereign author. It is to refuse 'to choose' some part of Scripture; it is to refuse heresy (in Greek, '*airesis* means a choice, from the verb '*airetizo*: in the aorist it is *heretisa*). The opposite word to *catholic* is *heretical*. Hence *sola scriptura* means that the norm for the church is the totality of Scripture.¹³

Until well after the sixteenth-century Reformation, nearly all of the Protestant bodies (except for the Anabaptists) still assumed the ancient Justinian (Legal) Code to be the bond of society. This code specified basic Catholic doctrine as the foundation of all civil life.¹⁴

Apostolicam

'Apostolic' has been used in two ways: first, to indicate direct succession from the original apostles; and secondly, to identify with the content of the apostolic doctrine.

First view: Direct succession from the original apostles through ordination
Irenaeus of Lyon, in the middle of the second century, personally knew Polycarp of Smyrna, who had been taught by the apostles. in his *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus wrote extensively against those who had been unfaithful to the doctrine taught by the apostles. Irenaeus apparently would have been able to give a list of the bishops of the churches, who in unbroken line went back to the apostles. He held that 'succession in direct line from the apostles was ... of the essence of the episcopate.'¹⁵

'In the third century the emphasis changed from the open succession of teachers to the bishops as perpetual successors of the apostles. This development owed much to the advocacy of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (248-58) [But this] fails to explain the absence of the idea in the first two centuries of the Christian era.'¹⁶ Various areas of (still Catholic) Europe took different approaches here. It was absent in Denmark,¹⁷ but long persisted in Sweden.¹⁸ The theory of apostolic succession was held in England until the turmoil of the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Second view of the apostolic succession: fidelity to their doctrine

A second view of the Apostolic Succession was that it primarily pertained to fidelity to the doctrinal teaching of the apostles, and this was set forth by

the sixteenth-century Reformers. John Calvin wrote: 'It therefore follows that this pretense of succession is vain unless their descendants conserve safe and uncorrupted the truth of Christ which they have received at their fathers' hands, and abide in it.'¹⁹

As David F. Wright said:

The Scots Confession of 1560 rejected as 'notes, signs and assured tokens' of the true Kirk 'antiquity, usurped title, lineal succession' (18). The Reformers saw no need for an episcopal system or for claims of unbroken continuity of ministerial orders, deriving from the apostles themselves.... In his response to the Jesuit, James Tyrie, Knox shows the succession of the Kirk to have flowed from the apostles in that it admits neither doctrine, rite nor ceremony not authorized in the apostles' writings (VI, 797-8).'²⁰

John Knox argued that 'the doctrine of apostolic succession lacked biblical sanction, though he went on to contend that the Scottish Kirk and ministry were in fact in apostolic succession inasmuch as they admitted nothing which did not have explicit apostolic sanction.'²¹

What Church history proves is that where the apostolic gospel has been faithfully proclaimed, multitudes have been converted; lives have been transformed; and the Lord has been thereby glorified! There have been long seasons, where – as John Calvin said about many years of the Medieval Church – 'the Gospel has been obscured,' but they were followed by days of massive awakening that shook the nations, once the Gospel was proclaimed again in its fulness.

But whether the awakening was with many or with few, the result was the same: when people heard the saving truth, they came into the presence of God, and their lives were transformed. Paul illustrates this process in 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, in the context of preaching in a known tongue: 'But if all prophesy, and there cometh in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.'

Marks of the Church

At the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation, opposing groups were vying for the name of 'Church'. The Roman Catholic certainly could claim

historical continuity, but the large Protestant groups could claim renewed fidelity to the doctrinal teaching of Holy Scripture. Both claimed to be ‘the Church’, so which one could legitimately claim the Nicene attributes for itself?

Bavinck showed that the concept of ‘marks’ or ‘notes’ was developed by the sixteenth-century Reformers as a way to test whether or not a body is truly the Church. That meant that the Reformation was no longer willing to let the Roman hierarchy claim that the attributes of the Church belonged by definition to them. G. C. Berkouwer stated: ‘In our time we see more than ever the truth that Bavinck expressed in this way: the Reformation denied that the Church is *autopistos* (self-authenticating)). He referred to the higher authority to which she is subjected and in which her being is founded.’²² He adds: ‘The *notae* – concentrated in one *nota* – imply a judge. They assume a standard that lies far above the church by which she may be judged by everyone.’²³

The Scots Confession of 1560 deals very graphically with this point in article 18: ‘... The notes, signs, and assured tokens whereby the immaculate Spouse of Christ Jesus is known from the horrible harlot, the Kirk malignant, we affirm are neither antiquity, title usurped, lineal descent, place appointed, nor multitude of men approving an error...[But] the true preaching of the Word of God ... the right administration of the sacraments ... [and] ecclesiastical discipline ...’

The central mark of the true Church is that of the Word of God, and faith in it, as Bavinck brings out.²⁴ But alongside the Word are the sacraments.

Sacraments of the Church

The word *sacrament* is not, as such, found in the New Testament. In the time when the New Testament was written, ‘sacrament’ was often used for an oath in the army. It seems to have referred more often to the oath the commander took to his troops rather than what the troops swore to the commander. So the Church used this word for certain ceremonies or rites that conveyed blessings to their people, based on the promises of God to them.

Most of the European languages take it from Latin, which tended to use it to render the Greek term *mysterion*. 1 Timothy 3:16 is a crucial verse: ‘And without controversy great is the mystery [*mysterion*] of godliness:

God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.'

What, according to this verse, is the great mystery? It is, in a word, something that would not be expected (a 'mystery'): God in the flesh, doing what was necessary to save those who dwelt in the flesh – i.e. humanity. Paul again speaks of the relationship between Christ and His Church, analogous to that between husband and wife, as 'a great mystery' (Eph. 5:32).

But God dwelling in and with man is a tremendous spiritual mystery; one hard for human minds to grasp. Thus God provided physical signs of this spiritual reality: water (baptism), and bread and wine (communion), and the inspired words explaining them. These physical realities (with their verbal explication) help us to get hold of the truth about who we are in Christ: baptized into Him once for all, and fed upon Him and by Him continually.

How sinners come into saving contact with Jesus

As we have already seen, to know Christ is to be related to God the Father through His divine grace, as Paul makes clear in 2 Corinthians 8:9: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.' The entrance of a believing sinner into this saving grace can be considered as happening through the speaking of a divinely given word, and at the same time, as a direct action of the Holy Spirit within that person.

Romans 10:9, 10 says: 'That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' This confession comes through the Holy Spirit: '... no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost' (1 Cor. 12:3b). Later in that chapter, the apostle describes our coming into the body of Christ as a kind of baptism: 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:13).

The Holy Spirit awakens us to faith, and this brings us into the very grace of God in Christ (Rom. 5:2). The miracle of the saving work of Jesus is that it reverses the death-dealing transgression of Adam (Rom. 5:12-21) and gives us immediate access to eternal justification (Rom. 5:18), so that ‘where sin abounded, grace did much more abound’ (Rom. 5:20).

Signs and Seals of This Saving Union with Christ

The major purpose of the sacraments is to witness to and thereby strengthen the spiritual bonds of this union. Some of the Church’s confessions have spoken of the sacraments as ‘signs and seals of the covenant of grace’ (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXVII.1). Thus, as the *Confession* says, ‘[they] represent Christ and his benefits, and confirm our interest in him ...’ (Ibid.).

A ‘sign’ is an appointed figure that demonstrates and, in some sense, conveys the reality for which it stands. A ‘seal’ is a work of the Holy Spirit that grants surety to the action in question.

This definition was attributed to Augustine: ‘a sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace.’²⁵ Whoever first said it brings out accurately that the sacrament is a form or sign of the unseen grace of God. This was particularly applied to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And Hugo of Saint Victor (d. 1142) brought out that for a rite to be a true sacrament, it had to have been instituted by Christ.²⁶

In the Middle Ages in Europe, various numbers of sacraments were proposed, in addition to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Everyone was agreed on these two, but others were added – sometimes as many as twelve. Eventually the number came to be considered as seven. Pelikan states: ‘It is not clear where the notion of seven as the number of sacraments began, although the anonymous *Sentences of Divinity* from about 1145 may have been the first to list the seven that were to become canonical: the five sacraments common to all Christians (baptism, confirmation, penance, the Eucharist, and extreme unction); and two that were not shared by everybody (marriage, which was only for the laity, and ordination, which was only for the clergy).’²⁷

Peter Lombard (d. 1160), the ‘Master of Sentences’, whose fourfold *Book of Sentences* was the major textbook for theology throughout Europe for centuries after his time, taught that the sacraments were sevenfold. He

was followed throughout Europe. The Council of Trent (1545-63) reaffirmed this number. Luther felt that the plain teaching of the New Testament taught only two sacraments. Herron comments:

The Pagan Servitude [of Luther] brought a wider-ranging critical analysis of all seven medieval sacraments, four of which – confirmation, ordination, marriage and extreme unction – Luther found to be no genuine sacraments at all. The principle he applied to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic sacraments may be summed up as follows: in effect it points to a fresh understanding of what a sacrament is. First, God deals with us in no other way than by his *Word of promise*, which calls forth and can only be heard *in faith*. Second, God commonly also attaches a *sign* as a mark of his promise. Third, only a sign which has been explicitly *given by God* as such a sign of his Word of promise can properly be called a sacrament ...²⁸

Calvin deals similarly with the other medieval sacraments (*Institutes* IV. XIX) and argues their lack of specific divine institution. What man adds to the original rites is not a sacrament.

Zwingli, as in his *Concerning True and False Religion* (1525), went much further than Luther in teaching that the words of Christ – ‘*This is my body*’ – meant no more than ‘This signifies my body.’ In doing so, he changed the meaning of sacrament, which was out of accord with Luther (and with the later Calvin). Herron sums up Zwingli’s position:

(a) It is mistaken to understand a sacrament as having any inherent power either to convey forgiveness or to strengthen faith for this ties the freedom of God’s Spirit to human performance. (b) A sacrament can accordingly only have the character of an *initiatio*, a ceremony of initiation ... a public confession of allegiance. (c) The worth and value of the flesh of Christ is not that it is *eaten* by us, but that it was *slain* for us. To ‘eat his flesh’ is, simply, to believe that he was sacrificed for us (John 6) ... (d) The glorified and risen body of Christ is in heaven ... it cannot be ‘present’ on earth in bread and wine.²⁹

Transubstantiation

Zwingli, and the other Protestants, who would soon be to some degree following him, felt it necessary to reject the very old Roman Catholic

concept of *transubstantiation*. This was the concept that the words of Christ – ‘This is my body’ – were to be understood literally, so that the physical elements of bread and wine were somehow supernaturally turned into His flesh and blood. This view developed over several centuries.

Berengar (d. 1088), in his recantation of 1079, thereby held that the bread and wine ‘are substantially converted’ into the very body of Christ. That became a way of describing the change: “‘Not in a phantasy, but substantially”; “earthly substances ... are changed into the essence of the Lord’s body”; the substance of the bread is changed into the substance of the flesh of Christ.’³⁰

According again to Pelikan: ‘It now seems that Rolando Bandinelli, who eventually became Pope Alexander III, was the first to speak of “transubstantiation”, in a work prepared about 1140, although it also appears in a work ascribed to Stephen of Autun from about the same time. Three-fourths of a century later, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 promulgated the dogma that ‘the body and blood [of Jesus Christ] are truly contained in the Sacrament of the Altar under the outward appearances of bread and wine, the bread having been transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood Even after the Reformation, the Council of Trent in 1551 reaffirmed transubstantiation ...’³¹

This supposedly miraculous change had been discussed in the ninth century, as by Paschasius Radbertus, who around 832 taught it in his *Liber de Corpore et Sanguine Domini*. In it he held that ‘The substance of the bread and wine is effectively (*effaciter*) changed internally into the flesh and blood of Christ (viii.2) However unclearly, he has begun the process of reflection on a change in the “substance” of the elements ...’³² The way was hence prepared for the lasting definitions of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and of Thomas Aquinas shortly afterwards. The 1215 Council, in its *Definitio contra Albigenses et Catharios* (DS 802),³³ and again by the Council of Lyons in 1274 (DS 860), propounded transubstantiation.

The most sophisticated advocate of it was Thomas Aquinas, who summarizes it in *Summa Theologica III, quaestiones 75-77*.³⁴ He advances it by means of some aspects of the logic of Aristotle, who – among other matters – distinguished between *substance* and *accidents*. ‘The substance of anything is what gives it its identity ... its form and character.’³⁵

But the substance has qualities ... These are the *accidents*, and together they constitute the *species*, the appearance or specific, visible and tangible form of the thing. The *accidents* are thought of as inhering in the substance, rather like pins in a pincushion; and it is the combination of substance, accidents and material which adds up to compose any particular object. With the help of this language... Aquinas brought a new clarity to the statement of the doctrine of transubstantiation. The substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, but the accidents of the elements remain.³⁶

In response to Zwingli, and in his continued intention to substitute something better for Roman Catholic transubstantiation, Luther went on to teach the *ubiquity* of the body of Christ. In it, he made novel use of the classical Patristic doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* ('the communication of properties') from one nature of Christ to the other. By this theory, Luther argues that the human nature shares in the omnipresence of the divine. But that is not what the mainstream of the Church tradition held. The main tradition stayed in line with the formula of Chalcedon (451), which affirmed that Jesus Christ, upon His incarnation, existed as two distinct (although never separate) natures in one Person. These natures related to each other through His person.

That is, the assumed human nature did not relate directly to His divine nature, but rather related by means of His person. Hence, the human nature did not take on divine attributes. As I have written elsewhere: 'The Reformed followed more closely [than the Lutherans] the earlier Catholic teaching that the properties of the two natures coincide in the one person, and only in that way can they be attributed to the other nature. That is, the divine properties are not to be *directly* attributed to the humanity, nor are the human properties to be *directly* attributed to the deity, but rather *indirectly* or *mediately*, in and through the one person in whom each nature is personally established.'³⁷

T. F. Torrance is to the point here:

God became man in Christ, but man did not, or did not also, become God. In the assumption of man into unity with the divine being, human nature was not divinized, but only raised into union and communion with God. If the divine Son assumed human nature into unity with himself only then to

divinize it, then that would mean that he had no sooner condescended to be our brother, than he broke off that brotherhood – the idea of a divinization of the human nature thus makes nonsense of the incarnation and reconciliation.³⁸

Part of Luther's issue was what T. F. Torrance called his

...strictly receptacle idea of space in his doctrine of the real presence. This enabled him to lay stress upon the *hoc est corpus meum* which finally became for him the ontological nail that held the two kingdoms together, and made possible real participation of one in the other. He knew that if ever there were to be substituted for the *hoc est* to *hoc significat*, the two kingdoms would fly apart and all that would be left would be an unbridgeable dualism with only a paradoxical and vague symbolic relation between them. Thus the *hoc est corpus meum* gave to the receptacle notion of space a fateful necessity in the history of Lutheran theology.³⁹

By the 'receptacle' view of space, Luther was working with something like 'a containing vessel'.⁴⁰ But as Torrance says, 'Because God transcends all things He is free and unbound wherever He is, without any kind of spatial tie.'⁴¹

For this reason, neither Catholic nor Reformed could accept the direction in which Luther went. That is why they could not affirm his teaching that the presence of Christ was somehow physically found 'in, with, and under the bread and wine.'⁴² The Reformed tradition taught that Christ was not present physically, but was indeed there in His mighty power *spiritually*. So, by this means, He was *really present*.

Two differing concepts among the Lutherans

Two leading Lutheran theologians after this time, John Brentz and Martin Chemnitz, gave rather different accounts of the 'communicatio idiomatum', as it was said to affect the ubiquity of Christ's human nature. John Brentz held that Christ's two natures were somehow merged into a common person. Hence he taught that divine properties extended to the human nature, including omnipresence: 'Because of this the body of Christ fills the whole universe. The technical term for the omnipresence of Christ's human nature is *ubiquitas*, ubiquity. Because of this ubiquity the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist.'⁴³

Martin Chemnitz does not seem to have gone so far, for he held that Christ's human nature is always localized. He held that the 'communicatio idiomatum', was not a permanent extension of divine attributes to the humanity, but rather a use of the human nature by the divine in modes that exceed human limitation.⁴⁴ He uses the ancient Patristic concept of *perichoresis* to try to explain the relationship of the two natures (which concept was normally reserved by the Catholic and the Reformed for the intra-Trinitarian relationships): 'Because of the intimate personal union the natures are in some way in communion with each other. Through their mutual interpenetration (*perichoresis*) there takes place the communication of the attributes of the two natures in Christ.'⁴⁵

Having looked at the development of these doctrines through the Middle Ages, let us now focus on the two sacraments most widely received since the sixteenth-century Reformation: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In his 1520 treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther listed three sacraments: baptism, penance, and the bread. However, as his translator, Charles M. Jacobs, wrote: [his inclusion of penance] did not last very long.⁴⁶ Indeed, later in this very treatise, Luther added:

Nor can the scholastics say that their definition fits penance, for they too ascribe to the true sacrament a visible sign, which is to impress upon the senses the form of that which it effects invisibly. But penance or absolution has no such sign. Therefore they are compelled by their own definition either to admit that penance is not a sacrament and thus to reduce their number, or else to bring forth another definition of a sacrament.⁴⁷

Baptism

Baptism was instituted by Christ in the New Testament. It had its forerunner in the baptism of John and was carried out by Jesus' disciples (cf. John 3:22, 26; 4:1,2). But its full institution was by the risen Christ in Matthew 28:19: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ...'

This formula (Matt. 28:19) really says 'baptizing into the name ...' This formula is used elsewhere: 1 Corinthians 10:2, 'baptized into Moses', and in 1 Corinthians 1:13, 'into the name of Paul.' The formula means a relationship to the person into whose name one is baptized. Courthial notes: 'Biblically, the "name" reveals the person (his characteristic traits, his

works). Cf. in the Old Testament – and this is only a sample! – Psalms 5:11; 9:10; 22:22; 23:3; 25:11; 75:1; 76:1; 89:16, 24; 119:55; Jeremiah 10:6; Ezekiel 20:44; Micah 4:5; Malachi 3:16; in the New Testament: John 17:12; Acts 9:15 ...’⁴⁸

Baptism into the name, then, takes us into a relationship. What is this relationship? We find in several passages that union with Christ is the main idea: as in Romans 6:3-6:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.⁴⁹

In addition to union with Christ being represented in baptism, there is the important related meaning of purification from sin. Since baptism involves a religious usage of water, and since regeneration is expressed in a few places in terms of washing (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11), it is reasonable to conclude that the washing with water in baptism represents the purification presupposed in union with Christ. Also, since Christian baptism has a relationship to the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21), we may assume that baptism represents the remission of sins, or purification from the guilt of sin, by sprinkling in the blood of Jesus.

And Christian baptism is in the context of the Jewish rite of circumcision (cf. Colossians 2:10-15). It will be discussed soon under the topic of infant baptism.

Baptismal Regeneration

Very large segments of the Christian Church have taught baptismal regeneration: that is, they have held that proper baptism actually *causes* the new birth, although at the same time, they place it in the context of faith and repentance as taught in the Church. Thus, it is not so much ‘mechanical’ as it is organic; part of a living system of truth and faith in the community of the Church.

That is what we see in Tertullian's treatise *De Baptismo* (early third century). He writes: '... the prescript is laid down that without baptism, salvation is attainable by none (chiefly on the ground of that declaration of the Lord, who says, unless one be born of water, he has not life) ...'⁵⁰ But Tertullian goes on to state that (except for Paul), the Scriptures do not say that the apostles were baptized. He adds that if one truly believes, one can be saved, even if not baptized.⁵¹

In the fourth century, Gregory Nazianzus develops this connection more richly:

Light, in a special sense, is the illumination of baptism of which we are now speaking; for it contains a great and marvelous Sacrament of our salvation Such is the power and grace of baptism; not an overwhelming of the world as of old, but a purification of the sins of each individual, and a complete cleansing from all the bruises and stains of sin Baptism is to be understood as a covenant with God for a second life and a purer conversation Let us then be buried with Christ by Baptism, that we may also rise with him ...⁵²

Near the same time, Gregory of Nyssa wrote (concerning the waters of baptism):

And this gift is not the water that bestows (for in that case it were a thing more exalted than all creation), but the command of God, and the visitation of the Spirit that comes sacramentally to set us free. But water serves to express the cleansing Now by a similar train of reasoning, water also, though it is nothing else than water, renews the man to spiritual regeneration, when the grace from above hallows it.⁵³

Centuries later, St Thomas Aquinas taught much the same and it has been the main position of the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries (both before Thomas, and since). In an edited version of his *Summa Theologiae*, he writes:

First, baptism is by definition rebirth to spiritual life and this fits with water: all seeds are moist and connected with water. Secondly, water's properties fit baptism's effects: its wetness cleans, its coldness tempers inflammability, its transparency lets through the light. Thirdly, it symbolizes

Christ's saving mysteries well: *when we submerge our heads in the water as in a tomb, the old man is buried and hidden below to rise renewed.* Fourthly, it is an abundantly common material easily obtainable anywhere, and thus suited to this most necessary sacrament.⁵⁴

The understanding of the Eastern Orthodox Church is in line with this, and has been clearly expressed in the twentieth century by the Romanian Orthodox theologian, Dumitru Staniloae (whom we have already met in several other contexts):

On the basis of their faith – or on the basis of the faith of those who vouch for their faith that is to be actualized, and thus on the basis of their potential faith – Christ has been imprinted at baptism upon their nature with His human nature; and His is a nature that is sacrificed, sanctified, and free of the original sin, of any other sin, and of any tendency toward sin. Unlimited in His infinite love by any egoism due to sin, Christ has been imprinted in their faith, or in their openness toward Him, as an *elan* of their response to His infinite love imprinted with the power of this infinite love in the one who has been baptized, in that very moment causing him to die to sin and to desist from its limitation and bondage.⁵⁵

He believes that this transformation happens through baptism, but only in the context of the faith of the church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, among many other places, connects baptism and the initiation of salvation:

By virtue of our baptism, the first sacrament of the faith, the Holy Spirit in the Church communicates to us, intimately and personally, the life that originates in the Father and is offered to us in the Son. Baptism gives us the grace of new birth in God the Father, through his Son, and in the Holy Spirit. For those who bear God's Spirit are led to the Word, that is, to the Son, and the Son then presents them to the Father, and the Father confers incorruptibility on them. And it is impossible to see God's Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of God's Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶

Sign and seal are not the same as the reality they point to

Evangelical Protestantism has insisted that while baptism and the Lord's Supper are divinely appointed signs and seals, to be continued in the church to the end of time, still they are not the same as the reality to which they accurately point. One of their leading representatives, John Murray, writes:

It is apparent that as a sign or seal it should not be identified with that which is signified and that which is sealed. The sign or seal presupposes the existence of that which is signified or sealed. Hence baptism is the sign and seal of a spiritual reality which is conceived of as existing. Where that reality is absent the sign or seal has no efficacy.⁵⁷

Murray denies that baptism, as such, conveys the grace which it signifies: 'The notion that it is the instrument of bestowing the grace ... is contrary to the nature of the rite as a sign and seal.'⁵⁸ What then is its purpose? Murray responds:

God condescends to our weakness. He not only unites his people to Christ but he also advertises that great truth by an ordinance which portrays visibly to our senses the reality of this grace. It is a testimony which God has been pleased to give us so that we may better understand the high privilege of union with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is the purpose of baptism as a *sign*. And what is its purpose as a *seal*? As seal it authenticates, confirms, guarantees the reality and security of this covenant grace.⁵⁹

Jonathan Edwards describes a 'seal' as follows: 'When God sets his seal on man's heart by his Spirit, there is some holy stamp, some image impressed and left upon the heart by the Spirit, as by the seal upon the wax ... they have the image of their Father stamped upon their hearts.'⁶⁰

A strong illustration is given in Acts of one who was baptized, but who was not regenerate. The apostle Peter loudly rebuked Simon Magus (a baptized man) for wanting to purchase the power to convey the Holy Spirit (as he had just seen the apostles do through the laying on of hands) as if the power of the Spirit could somehow be monetized. Peter severely warned him: 'But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast

neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee' (Acts 8:20-22).

God's Sacramental Action

Its nature as a sign and seal does **not** mean that grace is not conveyed through baptism (as through the Lord's Supper). What actually happens through the grace conveyed through the sacraments is what Calvin called 'God's sacramental action'. He wrote to this effect (as paraphrased by Ronald S. Wallace):

In revealing himself God takes up into his activity an earthly action or event, and unites with himself, for a moment, a human element. We may call this activity of God his sacramental action. In such sacramental action a union takes place between the divine element – the Spirit or action of God – and the human activity, so that the whole event is effectual in conveying the very grace depicted in its outward form. What God, therefore, depicts in the sacraments, he actually brings to pass through their agency. 'In the sacraments the reality is given along with the sign.' 'The true effect is conjoined with the external sign.' In the Supper we are 'effectually and in reality' invited to communion with Christ, 'for that is to say that the reality which the promise contains is here exhibited and that the effect is annexed to the external symbol.' Christ does the very thing which he shows, and ratifies what he does. He effectually uses this instrument to dwell in us Thus in the sacraments we have no bare figure but the giving of the thing itself.⁶¹

R. S. Wallace comments on this:

Thus the function of the sacraments is not merely to produce a healthy psychological effect by depicting to the eyes doctrines and facts that must not be forgotten, but to be the instruments of a gracious divine action, whereby what is represented to us is also presented to us. The sacraments are therefore not merely 'speaking symbols' (to repeat a phrase of Bishop Gore's): they are signs not merely of something that happened once in the past but of a present activity of God which is taking place in the midst of, and alongside, the human action.⁶²

Wallace goes on to explicate the position of Calvin here:

The signs and the things signified are not disjoined but distinct. ‘The sacrament is one thing, the virtue (*virtus*) of the sacrament is another’ [drawn from Augustine]. Calvin is thus concerned to maintain a middle course between Papists, who confound the reality and the sign, and profane men, who separate the signs from the realities. The efficacy and use of the sacraments will be properly understood by him who shall connect the sign and the thing signified, in such a manner as not to make the sign unmeaning and inefficacious, and who nevertheless shall not, for the sake of adorning the sign, take away from the Holy Spirit what belongs to him⁶³

In other words, proper baptism does not automatically cause a sinner to become regenerate, nor does a proper administration of the Lord’s Supper automatically cause Christ to be present in the service. It is one of the offices of the Holy Spirit to use both baptism and the Supper to convey such grace as He deems appropriate. The Scriptural promises are important, the state of the heart is important, the context of the Church is important (God uses them all), but it is the Holy Spirit who brings the transforming grace as He will, and when He will. And He brings this in accordance with the Word of God. In the question of baptism, Augustine wrote: ‘The word is added to the element, and there results the sacrament.’⁶⁴

The Spirit draws us to seek Him

But the Holy Spirit is full of grace and loves those who seek him (‘for the love of the Spirit ...’). Christ gives us the right to ask for the Spirit (‘how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?’). We seek Him because the Father is drawing us (‘No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ...’).

Water baptism pictures the baptism of the Holy Spirit, who supernaturally regenerates us into union with Christ. He cleanses us in order to do so. As Calvin writes: ‘Accordingly, we are initiated into the society of the Church by the sign of baptism, which teaches us that entrance into God’s family is not open to us unless we first are cleansed of our filth by his goodness.’⁶⁵ As Psalm 110:3 states: ‘Thy people shall be made willing in the day of thy power ...’

The Spirit is not hard to be found, especially when we reach the point of wishing to find Him, for He is, after all, The Gift.⁶⁶ Jesus says in John 7:17: 'If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' Jeremiah 29:13 promises in the context of the grace that will be given to Israel after their return from Babylonian captivity: 'And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.' This seeking of God from the heart will be a divine gift to a redeemed people:

For the LoRd hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LoRd, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all (Jer. 31:11, 12).

The Mode of Baptism

It appears to me that although the mode of baptism is certainly important, it is not so significant as the meaning of baptism. Yet for centuries, far more interest and energy have been expended upon the mode than upon what it signifies. But having looked at its significance, let us now look at its mode.

Usage of *bapto* and *baptizo*:

In the Septuagint

In the LXX *bapto* is used seventeen times and *baptizo* is used only twice (2Kings5:14; Isa. 21:4). It is not clear that there is much difference between these two words. Usually (though not always) they translate *tabal*.

- (1) Sometimes *bapto* means immersion, as in Leviticus 11:32, where it means dipping an article into water (translating *yabah*).
- (2) Sometimes *bapto* does not mean immersion. That is, dipping or being moist as used in the Old Testament is not always equivalent to immersion. For instance: in Leviticus 14:6, 51, we are given the ritual for cleansing a leper and a plagued house. No doubt, one could immerse a leper, but not a house. In Leviticus 14:16, the finger of the priest is placed into oil. This could imply immersion, but more likely, it refers to the wetting of the finger of the priest. In Joshua 3:15, the soles of the

priests' feet were dipped into Jordan, but the Jordan immediately drew back, and presumably their feet were not immersed.

In Daniel 4:23 and 5:21, *bapto* (in the LXX) translates *tsaba* (Aramaic): *kai apo tes drosou tou ouranou to soma autou ebaphe* ('his body was wet with the dew of heaven' – which is not equivalent to immersion).

In the New Testament

Baptizo is used eighty times and *bapto* is used only four times. Again, either verb can mean immersion, or simply, to be wet or moist (cf. Matt. 15:2; Mark 7:2-5). This 'tradition of the elders' had them washing their hands before eating. According to ancient Jewish sources (drawn upon by Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus*, II. 10, and John Lightfoot, *Works*, IX, p. 153 and XI, pp. 399ff.), the elders washed one hand with the fist of another, or poured water over their hands. Generally, the term 'baptized' was used for this action. For example, 'And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner' (Luke 11:38). This is far more likely not to mean literal immersion, and yet it is called 'to baptize'. Mark 7:4 states: 'And when they come from the market, except they wash (*me baptisontae*), they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (*baptismous*) of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and tables.'

Certainly, cups and pots would be immersed, but not tables. It is the same in Leviticus 14:6, 51, where the rite is prescribed by which the priest would cleanse a house in which was found the plague of leprosy. The priest was to take cedar wood and scarlet and hyssop, and two birds. The living bird was to be dipped in the blood of the bird that was slain. But this could not have been in any sense a full immersion, and yet *bapto* was used of it, so this shows that *bapto* does not always mean immersion. This demonstrates also that dipping does not always signify immersion. That is, the bird was dipped, but not immersed.

Hebrews 9:10-23 speaks of *divers washings* (in the original, *divers baptisms*). The context concerns purification of persons and contrasts the cleansing by the blood of Christ with that of the blood of animals. Thus the rites in these verses are included in the *divers baptisms*. The *sprinkling* of the book and of the people (v. 19), and the *sprinkling* of the Tabernacle (v. 21) are said to have been purificatory, and hence this purification is

included in the *divers baptisms* of verse 10. But they were sprinklings, not immersions.

Pentecost is described as a ‘baptism’. John the Baptist said that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11). We see something of how this happened in Acts 1:5: ‘For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.’ And also in Acts 11:15, 16: ‘And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.’

When the Holy Spirit came down, He is said to have been ‘poured out’ (Acts 2:17, 33, and 10:45). This divine action is ‘pouring out’, not immersion, yet it is called baptism. Jesus spoke of His coming work on the cross as a baptism: ‘But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!’ (Luke 12:50). The pouring down of His blood was not immersion, but it was a baptism. Acts 2:3 says that ‘cloven tongues like as of fire... sat upon each of them.’ This was a ‘pouring out’ (vv. 17 and 18) and a ‘shedding forth’ (v. 33) – thus, a baptism, but not by immersion.

The classical passage in Romans 6:2-6 that describes the baptism of believers into union with Christ does not necessarily specify the precise mode of water baptism:

... How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of you as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

This could possibly refer to immersion, but really it uses some different verbs to describe what happens. That is, verses 5 and 6 are parallel expressions of ‘baptized’. ‘Planted together’ could certainly mean immersion (v. 5), but ‘crucified with him’ does not seem to imply

immersion; rather, pouring down of blood. Hence there are many aspects to our union with Christ; no one phrase determines the mode of baptism.

As we have seen, Luke 11:38, which speaks of baptism, cannot mean immersion, nor does it clearly mean immersion in Acts 1:5, where baptism is parallel to the coming down of the Holy Spirit, as it is in Acts 2:3, 4, 17. In 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2, which refers to the people being baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, it does not mean immersion – but it is a baptism. Hebrews 9:10-23, as we have seen, speaks of sprinkling.

The Didache 7, and Cyprian, *Epistle to Magnus* 12, do not teach immersion. Some of the very early artistic representations of baptism (as in the Catacombs of Rome) picture baptism by pouring water on the head. That does not mean that immersion could not have happened, but at least it means that there were other modes of baptism. In Acts 2:41, some three thousand were baptized, and while immersion is not impossible, it is highly unlikely. In Acts 10:47, 48, at the conversion of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit was poured out, and the people were baptized. Again, immersion is not impossible, but not likely. In Acts 16:33, when the Philippian jailor and his household were baptized, it is far more probably to have been by some kind of affusion than by immersion.

The Baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17 gives us detail on the baptism of Jesus at the hand of John the Baptist, and Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22 mention it more briefly. In all four gospels (including John, which does not specifically discuss the baptism of the Lord), the baptism is linked to the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22, and John 1:32). Here in the waters of baptism, the holy One (who, being totally innocent, needs no repentance) is taking the place of sinners, who do need repentance. It is the opening of the picture of what he had come to do for us: ‘For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him’ (2 Cor. 5:21).

I believe that Pierre Courthial was right in seeing Jesus’ baptism as His ordination to His public ministry:

During his baptism our perfect and only Priest was desirous that ‘all righteousness be fulfilled’ and that everything ‘that the Torah taught be

observed'. Three things were required for a priest to be ordained. He needed to wait until the age of thirty (Numbers 4:3,47). He needed to be called (Exodus 28:1; cf. Hebrews 5:4), and he needed to be sprinkled with water by a priest (Leviticus 8:6; Exodus 29:4; 30:17-21; cf. for Levites: Numbers 8:6-7). The baptism of Jesus, the sacramental act of his ordination, was conformed to the arrangements of the Torah. It is specifically said that he was baptized at the beginning of his ministry when he was thirty years old (Luke 3:23); he was duly called by God (Hebrews 5:4-10); and he was 'sprinkled by water' by John, who was a lawful priest, being the son of Zechariah (Luke 1:5, 13). The priests of the old covenant were also anointed with oil. Better than oil, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, who descended and came upon him as he came up from the waters (Matt. 3:16).⁶⁷

We know that He walked out into the waters of Jordan, where John was, so as to be baptized by his cousin. Immersion is definitely possible, but so is pouring or sprinkling, as some of the earliest portrayals (in Rome) indicate. The Father speaks from heaven: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17). The Father's words of approbation are in line with the prophecies in Isaiah 42:1 and Psalm 2:7. This baptism in water will be followed by one in blood (Luke 12:50).

From Scriptural usage, as we have been seeing, we may conclude that immersion, pouring or sprinkling are all valid modes of Christian baptism. And over the long centuries, the Church has used all three.

The Baptism of Infants

In thinking of baptism, and more specifically of infant baptism, it is necessary to keep in mind the unity of God's Church in both Old and New Testaments. The church in both economies is called into being by the one Covenant of Grace, that runs throughout the whole scriptural history, from the Fall of Adam to the triumphant return of Christ, head of the church, and Lord of the entire cosmos.⁶⁸

Although, of course, there are different emphases in the various covenants across the history of redemption, depending on their part in developing the grace of God in the salvation of His people, there are also some strong continuities among them. One lasting continuity is how God includes the seed of believers with their parents in the economy of

salvation. This continuity holds true across the Old Testament era, down into that of the New Testament. Stephen speaks of the people of God in the Old Testament as ‘the church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38). In that regard, he also refers to a center-point of how this church functioned: *the covenant of circumcision to Abraham* (Acts 7:8).

Circumcision was given through Abraham to mark out his male descendants as being included with the Covenant of Grace. Abraham was circumcised as an old man at ninety-nine; Ishmael at age thirteen, and Isaac at eight days old. Presumably Ishmael would have understood (cf. Gen. 17:23-27), but Isaac could not have understood the significance of what was being done to him. Therefore, children only eight days old, not yet having the conceptual capacity of what we know as faith, were to be circumcised, and thus included in the covenant.

This ran all through the Old Testament, and right into the New. The essence of the central promise of this gracious covenant was this: ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’ (Gen. 17:7; Exod. 19:5,6; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; Jer. 31:33). As John Murray writes: ‘In a word it is union and communion with Jehovah, the God of Israel. It was this blessing that circumcision signified and sealed.’⁶⁹ Paul stated that circumcision was ‘a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he [i.e. Abraham] might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised ...’ (Rom. 4:11).

Now in the New Testament, circumcision comes to be replaced by baptism. Colossians 2:11, 12 shows this change: ‘In whom ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.’

This would certainly mean that infants and children of believers are to be baptized, as they were circumcised in the Old Testament. As John Murray says: ‘we conclude that the administering of the sign and seal of the covenant to the infant seed of believers is still in operation and has perpetual divine warrant. In other words, the command to administer the sign to infants has not been revoked: therefore it is still in force.’⁷⁰ The grace offered to the families of believers in the New Testament has not been narrowed down from that of the Old Testament.

1 Corinthians 7:14 teaches that the children of at least one believer are in a different category in the eyes of God from those of pagans: ‘For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.’ Peter in Acts 2:38, 39 applies the promises of God claimed by the parents to their children: ‘Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promises is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’

Paul says in Romans 11:16: ‘For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy, and if the root be holy, so also are the branches.’ ‘Holy’ as used here, seems to refer to being consecrated to God more than to the degree of one’s purity. In particular, both are in the covenant established by the grace of God. By analogy, there is a connection of parents to children, like roots to branches. The life of the latter flows from the former, and similarly, the holiness of the branches come from the root.

There are only twelve instances of baptism recorded in the New Testament: of these, three are household baptisms. It seems very likely that there were children (and/or servants) among some of them. Meredith Kline has written:

Households are mentioned along with the central authority figures in these instances, and these households had to consist of somebody in the category of household subordinates. Even with respect to the narrower question of whether parental authority is honored in the administration of the New Covenant, it would not matter whether conclusive evidence could be adduced proving that there were no children in any of these households; for if there were no children, then surely the household consisted of servants; and if it could be shown that servants were received into the church on the basis of the authority principle, it would follow *a fortiori* that the continuity with Old Testament practice included infants also.⁷¹

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

There are four accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament: Matthew 26:17-35; Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-30; and 1 Corinthians 11:20-34. In all three synoptic gospels, the introductory words

to the institution of the Last Supper mention the feast of unleavened bread (i.e. Passover) as the place and time where Jesus instituted this Supper (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). Hence, it was during the feast of the Passover that Jesus appointed this rite, which would be the fulfillment and thus the continuation of the feast of unleavened bread in the new economy.

J. Jeremias, in *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, argued extensively against the attempts of some scholars to place the Lord's Supper within Hellenistic practices, and showed that it was a Hebraic Passover meal.⁷² Betz, from a Roman Catholic viewpoint, argued much the same.⁷³ Alasdair Herron comments:

... the Passover itself as an act of remembrance, a *zikarron*, offers a context in which the command, 'Do this for my remembrance,' can be seen as a natural extension and development of the Passover ritual. It also suggests what kind of 'remembering' Jesus had in mind. It was not a mere looking back to his death, but a celebration of his offering of himself which would continually recall his own to their allegiance to him, and to the deliverance he had secured for them.⁷⁴

The Old Testament background

On the night of the tenth plague upon Egypt – the death of the firstborn – God instructed Moses to celebrate the Passover (when God destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, but 'passed over' the houses of the people of Israel in Goshen). It was called 'the feast of unleavened bread', because the Israelites had to leave in great haste, not taking time for the leaven to be put into the bread dough, so as to make it rise (as is explained in Exodus 11:1-10). This feast had such significance that the calendar of Israel was changed, and the time of its celebration became the first month of the year (Exod. 12:2).

God's people were to eat unleavened bread (because of their necessarily hasty retreat), and an unblemished lamb for every house (except where the family was small, in which case they were to join with another small family to share the feast – Exodus 12:4-5). They were to smear the blood of the lamb on the two side posts and upper door post, so that the angel of death would pass over them with the plague he was bringing (Exod. 12:7, 13).

The drinking of wine is not mentioned in Exodus 12, but it was obviously part of the ceremony, since both the New Testament and

rabbinical sources include it with the eating of the flat bread (e.g. Luke 22:17-18).

The Lord's Supper in the New Testament

It seems to have been in the midst of the Passover celebration with His disciples that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. One flows into the other. Jesus makes it plain that the bread represented His body, and the cup His blood: 'And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you' (Luke 22:19, 20).

As Rijssen shows, several terms are used for the Lord's Supper in the New Testament: 'Scripture calls it *deipnon kyriakon*, the *coena dominica*, 1 Cor. 11:20. It is called *eulogia* and *eucharistia* by Paul, 1 Cor. 10:16; *trapeza kyriou* (1 Cor. 10:21), *koinonia* (1 Cor. 10:16); *klasis artou*, fraction (breaking) of bread, Ac. 2:42; 20:7.'⁷⁵

Jesus explains that the broken bread speaks of His body being broken for His people. While none of His bones was broken, in accordance with prophecy (John 19:36; Num. 9:12), His body was broken in the sense that He was pierced by nails and thorns, so that He bled out and dismissed His spirit (John 19:30). He was broken for believers, so that the broken body and shed blood would always be available to be taken in by His people. As the Leiden Synopsis (XLV, 6) says:

Christ is signified as having suffered and died or his body broken and blood shed for the remission of sins, and by participation and communion in them, he is offered to those receiving as spiritual food and drink and conferred upon believers; to be used in remembrance of Christ as well as to proclaim his death, and for union and communion with Christ as Head into a true mystical body, proceeding for believers to certification of life eternal and the glory of God's grace.⁷⁶

The death of the Lamb of God was the supreme sacrifice, towards which all other earlier sacrifices had pointed. This sacrifice not merely covered sins temporarily, but utterly took them away for evermore, as Hebrews tells us. 'For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall

the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God...but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb. 9:13,14,26).

While the human conscience is cleansed through faith in this Lamb, He has appointed physical signs of our taking part in this sacrifice: namely, the broken bread and poured out wine – eaten and drunk by us – to help us continually grasp that we personally take into ourselves His death to save us. The eating and drinking the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper signify and seal our lasting union with Him.

As we take part by faith in the holy Supper, something is thereby happening that strengthens the bonds of union with our Lord and Saviour. There is mystery in it, beyond our human ability to explain, but that does not make its influence any the less real. It is a spiritual mystery: the Holy Spirit is drawing things together, past the capacity of our limited intellects to go very far in grasping. As Jesus says in John 3:8: 'The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' There is a definitely mysterious element, not only in the new birth, but in His continuing ministrations in the Christian life, including employing the Lord's Supper to draw us close to the Master. This drawing us closer is the work of the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin taught that the Holy Spirit evacuated the distance between Christ in glory and His believing people at the communion table on earth:

In regard to the Lord's Supper, I confess that it is an evidence of our union with Christ, since he not only died once and rose again for us, but also truly feeds and nourishes us by his own flesh and blood, so that we are one with him, and his life is common to us. For though he is in heaven for a short while till he come to judge the world, I believe that he, through the secret and incomprehensible agency of his Spirit, gives life to our souls by the substance of his body and blood.⁷⁷

In other words, something more is happening than our going through an appointed ritual in which we (properly, of course) remember that Jesus died for us.⁷⁸ The remembrance of faith is there, but it is more than that; it is not 'a bare sign'. Yes, it is a sign, but not a bare one, that is, with nothing else

than our own thoughts. The use and discussion of the term, 'bare' is related to wording in *The Scots Confession* of 1560 which strongly denied that it taught 'bare signs': '... Therefore, if anyone slanders us by saying that we affirm or believe the sacraments to be naked and bare signs, he is libelous and speaks against the plain facts.'⁷⁹

Calvin can help us here. He emphasizes that the signs are not empty: 'In general, I confess that, as well in the supper as in baptism, God gives in reality and effectually whatever he figures in them, but that to the receiving of this great boon we require to join the word with the signs And thus I join with the signs the very possession and fruition of that which is therein offered to us.'⁸⁰ Augustine wrote in section 3 of his eighteenth *Tractatus* on the Gospel of John: 'The word comes to the element and it becomes a sacrament, itself a kind of visible word.' That is why the sacraments are not to be administered apart from preaching.⁸¹

The seventeenth-century theologian, Heidegger, explained the necessity of proper teachers of the Church administering this rite which belongs to Christ's Church:

The first to administer was the same as he who instituted it, Christ. – By Christ's authority and orders the apostles in succession and those who followed them, the pastors and rulers of the Church (*rectores*) did and do administer it. No more than baptism or the preaching of God's Word can it be administered by private persons or by any private person at a banquet.⁸²

This is the reason why the Reformed Tradition requires that the sacraments be administered only by an ordained preacher of the Word of God. It is not so much his ordination that is at issue, but the fact that he lives, breathes, and interprets the Word on a weekly (if not daily) basis (at least if he is doing his job!) It is the one who preaches the audible Word who is to administer the visible Word.

In sum, the Church of earth meets afresh the risen Lord as He blesses the service of the Lord's Supper through the presence of His Holy Spirit. It is of overwhelmingly greater significance to say that Christ is present spiritually in this service than to insist that He is not locally present in the bread and wine. It is a major mistake to think that a physical presence would be stronger than a spiritual presence. That is because the physical is part of the created order, whereas the Spirit of God is on the side of the Creator, who

brought the physical into being, and uses it as He sees fit: in this case to signify and seal His true presence with faithful people.

Let us never think that the spiritual is less real than the physical, for the spiritual is eternal, while the physical is temporal. One caused the other to come into existence; one is primary, while the other is secondary. Hence when we say that the Risen Lord is present in the Supper spiritually, that does not play a poor second to saying that He is there physically. In fact, the spiritual presence is even stronger than the physical, and thus the Lord has given us that which is stronger in the sacraments.

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1. Calvin, *Institutes* IV. I. 3.
 2. Staniloae, op. cit., p. 57.
 3. Bavinck, quoted in Berkouwer, *The Church*, p. 47.
 4. Berkouwer, *The Church*, p. 51.
 5. Calvin, op. cit., IV. III, p. 12.
 6. Dulles, op. cit., p. 146.
 7. Staniloae, op. cit., pp. 67, 68.
 8. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. II. par. 2
 9. Dulles, op. cit., p. 124.
 10. Staniloae, op. cit., p. 72.
 11. Dulles, op. cit., p. 130.
 12. Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*.
 13. Pierre Courthial, *Le Jour des petits recommencements* (L' Âge d'Homme: Lausanne, 1998), p. 133.
 14. E.g. see J. K. Cameron, 'Scottish Calvinism and the Principle of Intolerance' in *Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation*, ed. Gemish and Benedetto (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1981), pp. 125, 126.
 15. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (Harper & Row, Publishers: New York, 1953), p. 132,
 16. Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984), p. 73.
 17. Latourette, op. cit., p. 734.
 18. Latourette, op. cit., p. 738.
 19. Calvin, op. cit., IV. II, p. 4.
 20. David F. Wright, 'Apostolic Succession' in Cameron, ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1993), p. 21.

21. Richard L. Greaves, *Theology & Revolution in the Scottish Reformation* (Christian University Press: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980), p. 75.
22. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church*, p. 18.
23. Ibid., p. 15.
24. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, pp. 540-41.
25. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, vol. 3, p. 208.
26. Hugo, *Sacr.* 1. 9. 2.
27. Pelikan, op. cit., pp. 209, 210.
28. A. Herron, *Table and Tradition* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1983), p. 109.
29. Ibid., p. 117.
30. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, p. 203.
31. Ibid., pp. 203-04.
32. A. Herron, op. cit., pp. 92-93.
33. Denzinger/Schonmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum ... ed. xxxiv. Herder, 1967.*
34. Ibid., p. 95.
35. Ibid., p. 96.
36. Ibid., p. 96.
37. Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology* vol. 2, p. 239.
38. T. F. Torrance, *The Incarnation*, pp. 222-223.
39. T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time, and Incarnation*, p. 34.
40. Ibid., p. 32.
41. Ibid., p. 33.
42. See Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, (1528). Wayne Grudem suggested a possible illustration of 'in, with, and under,' as being like a sponge filled with water – the water is not the sponge, but is present 'in, with, and under' a sponge, and is present wherever the sponge is found (*Systematic Theology*, IVP, 1994, p. 904).
43. Alar Laats and Kadri Laas, *The Concept of the Majesty in the Theology of Martin Chemnitz*, in *Trames*, 2002, p. 6 (56/51), I, p. 64 (*Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences # 1, 2002*), quoted in D. F. Kelly, op. cit., p. 241.
44. R. L. Ottley, *The Doctrine of the Incarnation* (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 115.
45. Laats and Laas, art. cit., p. 65, quoted in D. F. Kelly, op. cit., p. 241.
46. *Martin Luther: Three Treatises*, American Edition of Luther's Works (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1970), p. 132, note 27.
47. Ibid., p. 258.
48. Pierre Courthial, *A New Day of Small Beginnings*, Translated into English by Matthew S. Miller (Zurich Publishing Company: Tallahassee Florida, 2018), p. 113, note 2.
49. See also Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11.
50. Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, p. 12.
51. Ibid.
52. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration on Holy Baptism*, VI, VII, VIII, IX.
53. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*, ?????????
54. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, Timothy McDermott, ed. (Christian Classics: Allen, Texas, 1991), p. 562.

55. Staniloae, op. cit., p. 73.
 56. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 537.
 57. John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1962), p. 86.
 58. Ibid., p. 87.
 59. Ibid.
 60. Jonathan Edwards, *Works vol. III, 'The Religious Affections,'* p.160.
 61. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of Word and Sacrament*, pp. 159-60.
 62. Ibid.
 63. Ibid., p. 165.
 64. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John, Tractate LXXX*, p. 3.
 65. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. I. 20.
 66. We are reminded of this by Alexander Schmemmann: 'In Baptism we are born again of Water and the Spirit, and it is this birth which makes us open to the gift of the Holy Spirit, to our personal Pentecost. And finally, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit that "opens" to us access to the Church, to Christ's table in His Kingdom. We are baptized so that we may receive the Holy Spirit; we receive the Holy Spirit so that we may become living members of the Body of Christ, growing within the Church into the fullness of Christ's stature' (*Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* [Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974]), p. 116.
 67. Courthial, op. cit., p. 81.
 68. I have sought to deal with this oneness of the Covenant of Grace throughout the Scriptures elsewhere: see D. F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, vol. one*, Chapter Six, pp. 387-444.
 69. John Murray, *Baptism*, p. 50.
 70. Ibid., p. 53.
 71. Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, p. 97.
 72. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*.
 73. J. Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Vater*, Bd II/1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1955).
 74. Alasdair Herron, *Table and Tradition: Towards an Ecumenical Understanding of the Eucharist* (The Handsel Press: Edinburgh, 1983), p. 22.
 75. Rilssen (XVII, p. 43) in H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 628.
 76. Ibid.
 77. John Calvin, *Selected Works: Tracts and Letters, vol. 2, Tracts, Part 2*, translated and edited by H. Beveridge (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983), p. 134.
 78. Alexander Schmemmann offers the Orthodox approach to the mystery: 'The liturgy of the Eucharist is best understood as a journey or procession. It is the journey of the Church into the dimension of the Kingdom. We use this word "dimension" because it seems the best way to indicate the manner of our sacramental entrance into the risen life of Christ' (42).
- 'It is the very movement of the Church as passage from the old into the new, from "this world" into the "world to come" and, as such, it is the essential movement of the liturgical "journey." In "this world" there is no altar and the temple has been destroyed. For the only altar is Christ Himself, His humanity which He has assumed and deified and made the temple of God, the altar of His presence. And Christ ascended into heaven. The altar "thus is the sign that in Christ we have been given access to heaven, that the Church is the "passage" to heaven, the entrance into the heavenly sanctuary, and that only by "entering," by ascending to heaven does the Church fulfill herself, become what she is'

(50). *(For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*. Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000).

79. *The Scots Confession*, chapter 21.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 135.

81. cf. 'The proclamation of the Word is a sacramental act par excellence because it is a transforming act. It transforms the human words of the Gospel into the Word of God and the manifestation of the Kingdom. And it transforms the man who hears the Word into a receptacle of the Word and a temple of the Spirit' (Schmemmann, *op. cit.*, p. 54).

82. Heidegger, *Corpus Theologiae*, XXV, quoted in Heppe, *op. cit.*, p. 629.

CHAPTER 10

ELECTION

Out of His eternal love, God chose an immense multitude to be His church, so that they could share His life and love forevermore. This election was based on who God is, not on those who were chosen. They were chosen in covenant love, which is based in Christ. They are awakened so that they exercise faith in the Lord, and their lives bring glory to Him.

In a hymnic adaptation of some of the last words of Samuel Rutherford, Mrs Anne Ross Cousins wrote:

**‘... I’ll bless the hand that guided,
I’ll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel’s land.’**

The Church exists because the Triune God brought her into being – His was ‘the heart that planned.’ The One God in Three Persons, who existed from all eternity, had the church in His heart before there was a world. Even before the first created man Adam sinned, God already had a plan for his redemption, as we are shown in Revelation 13:8: ‘And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’ This clearly means that they were chosen before time began, as is said in 1 Peter 1:20, about ‘the precious blood of Christ’, ‘Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.’

Even before we consider the crucial matter of choosing, our thoughts must go back to the God who does the choosing. He is the ever-living God, who according to Exodus 3:14 is *yhvh* – ‘I am that I am.’ He always was, is, and will be; all depends on Him, while He depends on nothing outside Himself. He has no needs outside Himself, for He is the eternal fount of all joy, peace, and serenity. His inter-Trinitarian relationships constitute the most satisfying of all personal relationships (see John 17) and need nothing else added to them for fulness of blessing.

Yet out of His overflowing generosity, this God chose to bring into being a world, which would be inhabited by people created in His image, so they could share in His beatific life, and He could know them as His own. That is why, again, the words of *The Shepherd of Hermas* – that ‘the world exists for the church’ – are so apposite. As already stated, God has no need of them, but because of the infinite goodness of His generosity, astonishingly, He will not be without them. They are precious in His sight, He values them as the rarest jewels: ‘And they shall be mine, saith the LoRd of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him’ (Mal. 3:17).

Those very ones who are chosen to shine like precious jewels, sparkling in the light, who – with the wise ones Daniel speaks of – ‘shall shine with the brightness of the firmament’ (Dan. 12:3). Yet this pathway to such glorious light will, according to the plan of God, require that they pass through the refining, purifying fires of immense suffering: ‘And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ’ (Rev. 7:13, 14). These jewels, even more precious to God than a son is to us, were chosen ‘before the foundation of the world’ with exquisite care.

The Father sent His Son ‘to give his life a ransom for many’ (Matt. 20:28), and in particular these ‘many’ included precisely those for whom Jesus prayed in His high priestly prayer: ‘I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine’ (John 17:9). All that He did on earth was for them: ‘And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth’ (John 17:19). At the last, they shall enter into the City of Light through the twelve gates of pearl. They will be among the chosen multitude, for they were ‘written in the Lamb’s book of life’ (Rev. 21:27).

In the mercy of God their number may far exceed what we may have initially thought, an immense number that no man can count, whose sum is known only to God,¹ and it is not the major issue here. The issue to be addressed here is choice, or election, by God of those who will be His people.

Biblical words for election

Verbs

There are various verbs and nouns in Old and New Testaments that mean to choose, or to elect. The main Old Testament verb is *bahar*. It can signify ‘to select stones for a sling’ (1 Sam. 17:40); ‘to select a place of refuge’ (Deut. 23:16); ‘to select the service of God rather than idols’ (Deut. 30:19f.); ‘to select a wife’ (Gen. 6:2). Sometimes *bahar* indicates ‘taking pleasure in the one selected’ (Isa. 1:29). Indeed, the pleasure that the Triune God takes in the objects of His divine choosing is something we may tend to neglect. In the LXX and in the New Testament, one finds the verbs *eklego* (used in the middle voice, meaning ‘to choose for one’s self’), and *haireomai*, as of God’s choice (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13).

Nouns

In Hebrew – *bahir*, and in Greek *eklektos* (the chosen ones)

Biblical Usage

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb *yada* (to know) often implies ‘knowledge with affection’ (Gen. 18:19; Hosea 13:5; Amos 3:2). In the New Testament, the Greek text often uses *proginosko* (to foreknow), as in Romans 8:29 and 11:2. While the concept of ‘knowing beforetime’ is certainly involved, it particularly means ‘to set one’s affection upon’ (beforehand).

We see how this works throughout the long biblical story of creation and redemption. In the beginning, God created Adam, and from him Eve, to beget His people. But Adam sinned, and brought his progeny into a state of fallenness and death (cf. Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12-21). But even in this state where the human race was judged guilty, God’s choice was still at work. Among the sons of Adam and Eve, He chose Seth to be progenitor of the line of salvation (Gen. 4:25). His descendant Noah was chosen among all the corrupted human race, to enter the Ark with his wife and three sons and their wives, so they would survive the universal cataclysm in order to reproduce the human race (Gen. 6:5-13).

Noah’s three sons were Shem, Ham and Japheth, and from them all the tribes and nations of the earth are descended (Gen. 10:1ff.). But the particular line of redemption ran through Shem (whence ‘Semites’). His

descendant Abram (later, Abraham) became the father of the faith, both for his Semitic descendants, and also for the Gentiles (cf. Gen. 17:4, 5; Gal. 3:6-16).

Abraham's election was a sort of 'missionary promise'. It contained massive blessings for the entire world (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-8; 22:17-18; Neh. 9:7; Isa. 41:8, 9). In these and other passages, we find that God makes covenant promises to Abraham and his seed, to bless them, and through them the whole earth.

God Redeems Abraham's Seed

God redeemed Abraham's seed in a re-confirmation of election when He brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand through Moses. Once they came out through the Red Sea, they were led to Sinai, where they were given, through Moses, a significant covenant summarized in the ten commandments. This covenant, though oriented towards law, was based on the electing grace of God. The first-born of Egypt had been slain, while the children of Israel were spared, as we see in such texts as Exodus 3, Deuteronomy 6, and Psalm 105. Through Moses, the children of promise were delivered from bondage in Egypt to be brought into the freedom of the Promised Land.

But this election meant that Israel was chosen to live, not in obedience to the pagan Egyptians, but to the Lord who delivered them (Isa. 43:1; 51:2; Hosea 11:1; Acts 13:17). It is clear that this election and its renewal was the basis of the nation of Israel.

Israel's election was based on God, not on Israel

Israel was loved and chosen, not for her greatness or wonderful character, but because God set His love upon her (Deut. 4:37; 7:7-8; 9:4-6). God as sovereign exercises His mighty love in accordance with His own will, not in accordance with the loveliness of its object (Ezek. 16; Ps. 135).

Israel's election was in a covenant context

Biblical election takes place within a covenant community, which involves a relationship to the living God, with binding obligation, involving blessing and cursing, with a world-wide impact. A holy God creates a holy people to be in communion with Himself (Lev. 20:26; Deut. 7:6; Pss. 33:12; 95:1-10; Isa. 43:20). In Deuteronomy 27-28 and Leviticus 26, the Lord specifies the

blessings and cursings involved in either obedience or disobedience to His covenant.

This covenant relationship specifically required keeping God's Law (Lev. 18:4), especially in avoiding idolatry, as we see in both major and minor prophets, as well as in Ezra and Nehemiah. Hosea casts the covenant in a love/marriage relationship. This covenant involved God's supernatural protection over His people, so that He was to be trusted even in the dark (cf. Isa. 41:8-14; Ps. 139:5-14).

But if this covenant is abused, then national judgment will come (cf. Amos 3:2). False prophets liked to promise assured protection, simply because Jerusalem was chosen. But this was a lie (Isa. 1:10-20; 5:1-7; Jer. 7:1-15; Ezek. 13). As Micah 3:11 shows, there was no automatic protection apart from the covenant relationship with its obligations.

The Remnant Concept

Within this covenant, there developed the reality of the remnant. This was the historical result of disobedience and thus of covenant cursing, on the one hand, and of obedience and covenant blessing, on the other hand. Those who obeyed constituted the remnant (thus, a minority of the largely disobedient people). We see these realities presented to Israel in Deuteronomy 27-28 with their outworking prophesied in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Here is the question: does national judgment undermine God's original election? The answer is 'no', for a remnant is left. The Old Testament shows the development of the remnant.

Over the course of Israel's history, the reality of the Deuteronomic blessings would become progressively centered on the Messianic promise given in the line of David (2 Sam. 7). Through this royal line would come the fullness of covenantal blessing. A refusal, however, to 'hear' and faithfully accept God's providential dealings as He ushers in such blessing through the Messianic King would open Israel up to the experiences of the Deuteronomic curses. In rejecting the covenantal King they would reject the covenantal blessings. Israel's history is a case in point. Within years of David's death, the northern ten tribes ('the majority') of Israel reject the 'portion in David' and the 'inheritance in the son of Jesse' (1 Kings 12:16-19; 2 Chron. 10:16-19). They instead choose the man-centered control of the surrounding nations, guided by the false religion of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:26-33), whose 'sins' (1 Kings 13:34; 14:16; 15:30, 34; 16:2, 19, 26, 31,

etc.) would assure Israel's later downfall and destruction (2 Kings 17:15-23).

Yet even at the very beginning a 'remnant' of Israel (1 Kings 12:23) begins forming that holds to the Messianic Kingship. To them come the true Levitical priests 'that were in all Israel' who 'resorted' to Judah 'out of all their coasts' so as to uphold the worship of the LoRd (2 Chron. 11:13-14), the priesthood united to the kingship. And these two offices would be strengthened and refined by the Prophets, who will continually hold before Israel the reality of both covenantal blessing and cursing, calling them ever toward the glorious restoration of the former (Isa. 9:1-7; 55:1-13; Jer. 16:14-21)² and warning them of the horrific judgment of the latter (Isa. 9:13-21, 22:18-19, 65:12-15).³

The Prophet, Priest and King are never united in the Old Covenant. It is only in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 37:26-28; Heb. 8:8-13) that they are finally united under Jesus, the Messianic King (cf. Ch. 1 above), who in His very person takes the 'sins of Jeroboam' upon Himself, bearing the curses of the covenant (Isa. 53:3-12; 1 Pet. 2:24), so as to open His people up to the glorious, covenant blessings of New Creation (Isa. 61:1-11, 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-5).

Isaiah taught that only a faithful remnant would enjoy the age of blessing after the curse on national Israel (Isa. 10:20 f.). Jeremiah showed that God would cut out the hypocrites from among His people (Jer. 6:30; 7:29). Jeremiah promised a new heart for the remnant (Jer. 31), and Ezekiel taught that, after a time of judgment, God's elect would be enabled to live faithfully within the covenant.

That is to say, Israel before, and the Church after, will always fail in ushering in the covenantal blessings by obedience to the demands of the Law (2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chron. 36:14-21). It is the mercy of the Lord that assures the salvation and restoration of the remnant. And it is His Spirit that brings the life of the risen Christ into the center of their beings, renovating the wellsprings of their soul and giving them a 'new heart' and 'new spirit' so that they may 'walk' the narrow path of His commandments (Ezek. 36:26-27).

The New Testament bears witness to this reality.

Election Constitutes the New Testament Church

There is a major shift of emphasis after the Incarnation, in that non-Jews are now massively brought into the elect covenant community. It is a shift of focus from the Jews to the Gentiles (although always including many Jews). Without doubt, the early Christian Church was a heavily Jewish congregation, but soon its energies turned to the salvation of the Gentiles (as we see in Acts and Galatians). Gentiles now became the people of God; sons and daughters of Abraham. According to Galatians 3:14, 26-29 and 6:16, such Gentiles are now the true people of God, and sons of faithful Abraham (Rom. 4:16).

It is God who did this choosing: first, of the Patriarchs and their descendants, the Jewish nation, and then later in the history of redemption, of very many Gentiles. He chose them; He established and maintained the relationship. They were 'made willing in the day of his power' (Ps. 110:3). Yes, they were willing, but that was because the Spirit of God made them willing. In other words, divine election wrought a change in their attitude towards God.

The significance of election is seen even within historical Israel, before the Gentiles were brought into the community of faith. Scripture plainly tells us that merely being a physical descendant of Abraham was not sufficient to guarantee election and its outcome in glory. 'For they are not all Israel which are of Israel' (Rom. 9:6). 'Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded ...' (Rom. 11:7). 'Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated' (Mal. 1:2-3).

Thus, through the generations, there was an electing discrimination within physical Israel, by which some were chosen (as Jacob) and others were passed by (as Esau). And with the coming of Christ in the flesh, and the opening of the way for the Gentiles, this electing mercy encompasses massively more multitudes, but the choice is still based on God's choice, not on the persons chosen. Paul demonstrates this in Romans 9:15-16, 20-22. Romans 9:11 states: 'For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth: It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger....' The choice is 'according to him who calls', not according to the later obedience of those chosen to be covenantally faithful (for they had not been born yet).

Paul then addresses the hardest question that can ever be put to the biblical concept of election: if election depends on God's will, then any person who dies lost is the fault of God: 'Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?' (Rom. 9:19). His answer is this: 'Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?' This indicates that the standard of righteous and pure judgment is within the character of God Himself. What He does with the vessels He makes is therefore by definition right.

This is profoundly different from elements of the Platonic philosophy which was widespread in the day of Paul. In his *Euthyphro*, Plato raised the question (through the mouth of Socrates): 'Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?'⁴ But Paul would not be subjected to such a question, for it implies that there is a standard of judgment *outside* the character of God. And if so, then He would also be subject to it, which cannot be the case.

Paul teaches that all that is right is based in the character of God, for He is holy and righteous in His very essence. Hence, holiness and right are – since they are rooted in who God is – personal. They do not come from some kind of impersonal standard, exterior to God. Thus to say that God does something means that it is righteous and holy: one can go no higher than that. The final answer to what happens to mankind is personal and it lies in who God is. No one is in a position to bring Him into account, since it would be an attempt to place Him in subservience to an external measure of right and wrong. Certainly no such thing exists.

But one further observation is called for: the illustration shows God's passing by sinners (i.e. preterition); it is not innocent persons whom God is passing by, for according to Romans 9:21, he 'endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ...' Also, Romans shows that the whole race of humankind is fallen, and thereby under God's righteous judgment. Now some undeserving sinners are chosen to be vessels of mercy. In choosing even a few, God is utterly gracious! The biblical perspective is to focus on God's goodness and mercy to those chosen, not on His passing by others, who rightly deserve God's wrath. We must never forget that God never had to choose anyone in order to retain His own total integrity of character.

Unbelief is endemic to the fallen race, and it merits God's wrath. Reprobation (or preterition) is all that is necessary for people to be vessels of wrath at the same time that God is just. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that God causes some people to be unbelievers. Rather, they are that inherently. Paul's emphasis is not on the reprobate, but on the staggering fact that any sinners do believe and do respond to God's offer of mercy in Christ, thus being vessels of mercy.

Left to themselves, passed by as they are, sinners do not repent and believe (as is shown in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 and John 3:3), but when God's Spirit comes and renews the sinner's heart, the first evidence is faith. This faith in Christ is a sign of election, as a vessel of mercy (cf. 1 Thess. 1:4-6; Acts 13:48).

What Calvin writes about Jacob and Esau is true across the board of all who are chosen (and of all who are passed by):

Though they were not yet born (i.e. Jacob and Esau) and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, it was said, 'The elder will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated' [Rom.9:11-13; cf. Gen. 25:23.]...the adoption of Jacob comes not from works, but from God's call.⁵

He adds: '... this distinction between the brothers depends not upon any basis of works but upon the mere calling of God, because it was established between them before they were born.'⁶

Who of us humans, if we are thinking realistically, would not prefer the high matter of election to be in the hands of a holy and omniscient God? Who are we in our sin and severe limitations to make such decisions? God is all-good and all-wise. Whatever He does is well done, and we can always rest in it. 'God is love', and His love directs all the decisions He makes from beginning to end.

It is never the case that God's election of individuals depends upon His foreknowledge of what they will do, for He makes such decisions before they are born; before they do either good or bad. Even if, as some have argued (on the Arminian side), He chooses those whom He foresees will make the right decisions, still they would only choose to reject Him unless He sovereignly intervened and turned their hearts to Him. Those who make

the right decision (to accept God's offer of mercy in the gospel) do so because His Spirit opened their hearts and eyes to see and receive the truth. Without divine intervention, they would never have done so, given that – like the rest of the fallen human race – they willingly suppress the truth about Him (cf. Rom. 1:18).

Scripture locates the foreknowledge of God within His purposes of foreordination:

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:27, 28).

...having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph. 1:5).

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11).

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29, 30).

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory (1 Cor. 2:7).

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain (Acts 2:23).

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (Rom. 9:23).

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them (Ps. 139:16).

There is no human answer as to why some believe and others reject. God's judgments are a great deep, and it is not given us to fathom them. John Dick has said:

I would not be understood to insinuate, that the procedure of the Almighty was arbitrary, or that there was no reason why he preferred some to others, because he who acts without reason, acts without wisdom; but I affirm, that the preference was not owing to any difference in the moral character of its objects the sovereign exercise of mercy renders us absolute debtors to our Maker: It leaves not a vestige of merit, it humbles us in the dust. How contrary this procedure is to our natural inclination, you need not be informed ⁷

What Paul exclaims in Romans 11:33-36 is as close as one can come to addressing this mystery:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Reprobation

The same gracious God who chose some sinners to be saved also passed by others, leaving them in their sins. This is not a matter of inappropriate usage of human logic, but rather, of clear scriptural teaching.

The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil (Prov. 16:4).

Christ was called to be to the wicked, ‘And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed’ (1 Pet. 2:8).

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption (2 Pet. 2:12).

For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17).

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

But in contrast to these, Jesus speaks of His disciples, whom He tells to rejoice, because their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:20). Paul says that his fellow workers have ‘names in the book of life’ (Phil. 4:3). He states that ‘the vessels of wrath’ which were ‘fitted unto destruction’ were ‘endured with much long suffering’ so that God might ‘show his wrath, and make his power known’, and these are contrasted to the ‘vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory’ (Rom. 9:22, 23). But God ‘gave them up [i.e. the heathen] unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting’ (Rom. 1:28). The wicked, ‘after his hardness and impenitent heart treasures up for himself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God’ (Rom. 2:5).

Paul says that upon those who perish, ‘God sendeth them a working of error that they should believe a lie’ (2 Thess. 2:11). Paul describes such as these in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia: ‘Behold, ye despisers, and

wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days. A work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you' (Acts 13:41).

John describes the same thing in a different way:

But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart: that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them' (John 12:37-40).

Jesus exclaimed: 'For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind' (John 9:39). In Matthew 11:25, he also said: 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'

The elderly saint Simeon, who blessed Christ when His parents brought Him to the Temple, 'said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against' (Luke 2:34).

When Jesus was teaching in parables, the disciples wanted to know why:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, by hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matt. 13:10-15).

Paul tells us that ‘the election’ obtained a true hearing and conversion ‘by grace’ (Rom. 11:5,6), but that ‘the rest were blinded’ (Rom. 11:7). He adds in Romans 11:8-10: ‘(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block, and a recompence unto them; Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.’

This divine hardening was done to the enemies of Moses: ‘But Sihon, king of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him: for the LoRd thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day’ (Deut. 2:30). God also hardened the hearts of the Canaanite tribes, who came out against Joshua: ‘For it was of the LoRd to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LoRd commanded Moses’ (Josh. 11:20).

Something like this divine hardening was put upon the two disobedient sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, who ‘Notwithstanding ... hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LoRd would slay them’ (1 Sam. 2:25). Paul saw that God hardened even further Pharaoh, who had treated God’s people wickedly: ‘For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will, he hardeneth’ (Rom. 9:17,18; see also Exod. 9:16).

While these verses tell us that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, we are also told that Pharaoh had hardened his own heart (cf. Exod. 8:15; 8:32; 9:34). For His judicial purposes, the Lord can add hardness to the sinful hardness that is already there. In the nature of the case, we are not looking at those who are free from sin, but of sinners already in various degrees of hardness. God does not harden those who are not already hardened! Sometimes He adds to their hardness, for His own good reasons, which are not revealed to us. This is among ‘the secret things of the LoRd ...’ (Deut. 29:29).

That is, God sovereignly draws some sinners from the general fallenness of humankind, and leaves others in it; indeed, when He chooses, He can increase their hardness against Him. This could only be considered

unfair, if He did not remove from their fallenness those who deserve to be removed. But, owing to the universality of original sin that inheres in all humans, no one has ever deserved to be lifted out of their fallenness. The wonder of grace is, not that He does not lift all out, but that He lifts anyone out at all. Instead of questioning, we should be praising. For we remember that Jesus came into the world ‘not ... to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved’ (John 3:17).

If someone raises the objection of why God created a world such as this, knowing that all mankind would be condemned under sin, we respond, again with Scripture. ‘Before the foundation of the world’ Christ Himself became ‘the lamb’ who was ‘slain’ (Rev. 13:8). That is to say, before the very creation of our world, there was the understanding of its fall, yet at the same time of the reality of eternal love surrounding it. There is a deep mystery here which words certainly cannot adequately articulate. What can be affirmed, however, is the love that preceded the creation, and this is perceived across the ages and across different theological traditions. So, for example, John of the Cross provides an answer to the above objection. As only poetry can do, he offers an approach to the mystery in his poem, ‘The Incarnation.’

He opens with the Father speaking to the Son regarding His ‘bride’ that was made in His ‘likeness’ to be with Him in glory now ‘groaning in the house of bondage.’ To this the Son responds that He is ‘ready’ to ‘make known’ the ‘goodness’ and ‘wisdom’ and ‘might’ of the Father, to ‘manifest’ His ‘justice’ and ‘proclaim through the earth’ His ‘supremacy and beauty and the sweetness’ of His ‘worth’. The poem comes to a conclusion with these final words,

I will go and seek My bride, then
And upon Myself will take
All the poverty of sorrows
She now suffers for My sake.

And that I true life may give her,
I will give for her My own,
So shall I present her, rescued,
From the pit, before Thy throne.’⁸

God passed by all of the fallen angels, and He could have just as properly passed by all fallen humans (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). But He intervened and chose to make many of them vessels of mercy, while leaving the others in their own sins. At the end of the day, they shall be judged, not because they were not elect, but for their own sins. That is the message from the scene of final judgment given us in Matthew 25:31-46. One could certainly say that ‘the sheep’ (whose deeds honour God) were chosen, while ‘the goats’ (who dishonoured God) were passed by. But the issue presented at the last judgment is what they did with their lives. That determines whether they go away into life eternal or into everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46).

It is certainly the case that no one will be sent to hell who does not deserve to be there. And while it is true that all do deserve to be in that awful place, those who actually go into it are not done wrong by the fact that God chooses to lift some out, so that they do not enter into torment. A just God does not simply evacuate their torment, but, in fact, the torment they deserve was laid on Christ, who bore it totally away: ‘Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed’ (1 Pet. 2:24).

We can conclude that reprobation is a means of demonstrating an important attribute of God: His hatred for sin, and His just punishment of it. This is not to say that this is the only way He could demonstrate this attribute, but it is a chosen way. It shows His wrath, and makes His power known upon the ‘vessels of wrath’, fitted to destruction (cf. Rom. 9:22,23). We are given no fuller explanation of it. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:25 and 26: ‘I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.’

Hence we can conclude that the emphasis of Holy Scripture is massively more on salvation than on condemnation; many more passages deal with election than with reprobation. It is therefore not correct to say that election and reprobation are parallel decrees. It may seem so in human logic, but the confessions of the Church have not gone in that direction, and in not doing so, they stayed close to the Scriptures. As G. C. Berkouwer brings out, *The Canons of Dort* (1618–19) do not place election and reprobation on the same level. He states that ‘in the defence and warning’ to the Canons:

... it is denied that in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and the cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety (Conclusion of the Canons). Then it is emphatically stated that the Reformed churches ‘not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul’ such teaching.⁹

And Bavinck rightly remarks that ‘no one in the Reformed Church has dared to speak of a *praedestinatio ad peccatum*.’¹⁰

There is good theological reason for this. To quote Berkouwer again: ‘On the one hand, we want to maintain the freedom of God in election, and on the other hand, we want to avoid any conclusion which would make God the cause of sin and unbelief.’¹¹ He adds: ‘On the one hand, Calvin recognizes God’s absolute predestination, and on the other, he looks for another cause: “Moreover, though their perdition depends on the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves (*Instit.* III. xxiii. 8).”’¹²

But this does not mean that it is outside God’s all-encompassing plan. This is certainly mysterious, and Berkouwer reminds us of Calvin’s confession of *ignorantia nostra* of this matter: ‘The only thing he can do is to refer again to the word of Augustine that that which happens against God’s will does not occur apart from His will. But there is no *ignorantia coram Deo* – regarding sin and the judgment of God.’¹³

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) seeks to keep the biblical balance between God’s election and man’s choice to sin. It states in Chapter III (‘Of God’s Eternal Decree’): ‘God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.’

Although the *Confession* gives appropriate Scriptural proofs at this point, it never seeks to explain what is beyond human explanation: how God’s absolute pre-determination of all things leaves open the liberty of man’s choices and the contingency of secondary causation. What it does do is proper: it faithfully sets forth both sides of this biblical description of God’s voluntary functioning within God’s absolute counsel. The Holy Scriptures do not explain how these two sides of the truth fit together, and so the *Confession* does not attempt to do so either. But what it does do (in the

eighth paragraph of Chapter III) is to speak of it as a ‘high mystery’. By the way, all creeds and confessions of the Church deal with mysteries, for whenever eternity and time meet together (as in the dealings of God with man), there is always mystery, although we could say that it is more luminous than dark.

That eighth paragraph of the Chapter on God’s Eternal Decree (III) gives wise advice to the preachers of the Church: ‘The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending to the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey this Gospel.’

Pastoral Counsel

Some pastoral counsel should properly be added here. Scripture, and the best divines, do not indicate that we should worry over whether we are elect or reprobate. Such high things are in the hands of God, not in ours (cf. again: Deut. 29:29). John Calvin addressed this matter most clearly, when he said that ‘we are not to seek for assurance of salvation *outside the way*’. By that term, he means ‘the gospel way’.

In fact, he attributes to Satan the arousing of ‘a wicked desire to seek [assurance] outside the way ... when mere man attempts to break into the inner recesses of divine wisdom, and tries to penetrate even to highest eternity, in order to find out what decision has been made concerning himself at God’s judgment seat ...’¹⁴ But God’s way for us is very different; it is the way of humble listening to His gospel.

We are never to investigate our standing in God’s eternal plan ‘apart from his Word’.¹⁵ This means that ‘... if we seek God’s fatherly mercy and kindly heart, we should turn our eyes to Christ, on whom alone God’s Spirit rests [cf. Matt. 3:17] ... Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election.’¹⁶ This is a way of referring to the gospel, and to personal faith in it:

Now he gave us that sure communion with himself when he testified through the preaching of the gospel that he had been given to us by the Father to be ours with all his benefits [Rom. 8:32]. We are said to put on

him [Rom. 13:14], to grow together into him [Eph. 4:15], that we may live because he lives He, I say, was our witness that the Heavenly Father will count as his sons all those who have received him by faith.¹⁷

He adds that, for assurance, we are to look nowhere else but the promises: ‘For it is his will that we be content with his promises, and not enquire elsewhere whether he will be disposed to hear us.’

1. B. B. Warfield argues for preponderant numbers of saved over against lost in his article, ‘Are They Few that be Saved?’

2. See also Hosea 1:10–2:1, 2:19–23, 6:1–3, 10:12, 11:8–11, 14:1–9; Ezek. 34:20–31; Joel 2:21–32; Micah 5:1–4; Zech. 9:9–10; Mal. 4:2–6.

3. See also Jer. 16:10–13; Lam. 2:17; Hosea 9:3–6, 11:5–6; Hag. 2:17; Mal. 2:2, etc.

4. Plato, *Euthyphro*, in *Loeb Classical Library, Plato I*, translated by H. N. Fowler (London: William Heinemann, 1982), p. 35.

5. Calvin, *Institutes*, III. XXII. 4.

6. *Ibid.*, III. XXII, p. 5.

7. John Dick, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

8. John of the Cross. *The Living Flame of Love*. Translated by David Lewis. XVI. The Incarnation (Kindle edition. Omaha: Patristic Publishing, 2019).

9. G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1960), p. 175.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

14. Calvin, *op. cit.*, III. XXIV, p. 4.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, III. XXIV, p. 5.

17. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 11

THE WORD OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE

The Triune God speaks within Himself for all eternity, and speaks to His people whom He calls to Himself at the time of His choosing. Although all people know much about God in general, only His chosen ones are granted reception of that special revelation that is a part of salvation. This revelation is historical, redemptive, and also explained in words. In particular, Holy Scripture expresses the eternal will of God, and is fully inspired. Christ held the highest view of the Scriptures, and from early centuries, the Church has recognized its canon. It takes the internal witness of the Holy Spirit within us for us to grasp its truth.

God is not silent. He has always communicated within Himself as three Persons in one Reality. The Son, the second person of the Trinity, is ‘the Word’, and among other things, this indicates that within the Godhead there exists vital communication. Out of this inner vitality, God spoke worlds into existence, creating finite persons in His own image who could share in the life of the Word.

Then we see His first words to mankind: He communicates the full-ness of blessing in the five-fold divine command to ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion’ (Gen. 1:27-28). Man, created in God’s image, is given reign over the creation. He is to ‘work (*abad*) and keep (*shamar*)’ the garden (Gen. 2:15). (These very words are used throughout the Pentateuch to indicate the priestly care of the Temple.¹)

Then God gives him the command upon which life in His presence or exile would depend (Gen. 2:16-17). Fascinatingly, immediately after such a command, God makes Adam to know that ‘it is not good that man should be alone’. That man may know communion not only with the eternal God but also with his perfect equal, He says, ‘I will make him a helper (*ezer*) comparable to him.’ This is the only place in Scripture where this word refers to humankind. Elsewhere it communicates God’s salvation of His people. He is their ‘help’, ² their ‘deliverer’ (Ps. 70:5) and ‘their shield’ (Ps.

115:9-11). Here, however, it is man's union with woman as 'one flesh' that will not only enable, heighten and strengthen their calling, but, moreover, look mystically to the final union with Christ. It is an indication that the help and deliverance that God has prepared for His people is realized in their communion with one another through and in Christ.

When God forms Eve and brings her to Adam, we then hear the first words of mankind, spoken in response to God's goodness. These opening words can only be described as love poetry (Gen. 2:23-24) and are taken up first by Christ, then later by Paul, in describing the strength of the marriage union that 'God has joined together' (Matt. 19:5-6), which looks to its final consummation in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Eph. 5:31-32).

After they enter into sin, the union they enjoy with one another and with God is broken. And it is precisely here where mankind is given the first promise of grace, often referred to as the proto-euangelion: 'And I will put enmity between thee ...' Man's enmity against the devil was a direct blessing of God, as we see in this promise. And then, over the centuries, the Lord speaks to patriarchs and prophets, and later, to the apostles, as we shall see.

God is in charge of this communication with His image-bearers. From His holy heights, He reveals what He wants mankind to know, as part of their communion with Him.

Revelation

Our English noun, *revelation*, comes from Latin: *re-velare* ('to pull back the veil'), and the Greek verb means the same: *apo-kalupto*. As some of the Church Fathers said, 'Only God can reveal God.' That is because God dwells in light that no man can approach unto (cf. 1 Tim. 6:16), and hence He can be known only as He makes Himself available to mankind.

While man is finite and God is infinite, still the finite can be given, to a true degree, knowledge of the infinite on the grounds of their sharing 'personality' (God the Creator, man the creature, made in His image). The knowledge of God that man is given is never exhaustive but is nonetheless true: a thimble cannot contain the Atlantic Ocean, but at least, it can hold some of it. To put it in terms used by Hilary and Calvin, we can know God truly, but not exhaustively.³ Calvin states that in order for this to happen, God 'accommodates' Himself to our frail capacities. He writes in *Institutes*

I. XVII. 12 (concerning the statement that God ‘repented’): ‘Surely its meaning is like that of all other modes of speaking that describe God in human terms. For because our weakness does not attain to his exalted state, the description of him that is given must be accommodated to our capacity, so that we may understand it.’⁴ In reference to ‘the hidden wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 2:7), Calvin writes: ‘Lest anyone, I say, should reckon that he has nothing to do with the *hidden wisdom*, or should imagine it to be unlawful to direct his eyes towards it, as not being within the reach of human capacity, he teaches that it has been communicated to us in accordance with the eternal counsel of God.’⁵

In a remarkable passage, he speaks of God’s ‘lisper’ to us, as a nurse prattles to a baby (in the context of Scripture’s ascribing eyes and hands to God): ‘For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to “lisp” in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speech do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.’⁶

Traditional Theology has spoken of divine revelation coming in two different ways: (1) Natural and Supernatural Revelation, and (2) General and Special Revelation.

Natural and Supernatural Revelation

This distinction refers to the manner (or perhaps, *place*) of God’s revealing himself. Even when the revelation is called ‘natural’, it is still of supernatural origin. But the mode through which it comes is primarily in nature. Louis Berkhof says: ‘Natural revelation is communicated through the media of natural phenomena, while supernatural revelation implies a divine intervention in the natural course of events; it is supernatural not only in origin, but also in mode.’⁷

Natural Revelation is, as Berkhof observes, ‘that revelation which is communicated through the phenomena of nature, including the very constitution of man.’⁸ Calvin describes it as follows: ‘God daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. Upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory there is no spot in the universe wherein one cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory.’⁹

Supernatural Revelation is ‘A direct intervention into the course of nature, in which, he, even when using natural means such as dreams and oral communications, employs them in a supernatural way. It is revelation that is both verbal and factual, in which the words explain the facts, and the facts illustrate the words.’¹⁰

This is continually illustrated in Holy Scripture by the long history of Israel. In Judges, for example, when a good judge led the people to forsake idols and return to the Lord, the people were generally relieved from oppression by their enemies, and granted a relatively happy social life, at least for a time (unless they returned to idolatry), as was the case with Gideon (e.g. Judg. 7–8). The reason for their deliverance or return to oppression was made clear in words from the Lord (e.g. Judg. 10). And so it was through the long centuries of the prophets, from Samuel until the end of the Old Testament era. Facts (such as the Babylonian Captivity) are explained by inspired words, and the words are carried out in the historical facts.

General and Special Revelation

This distinction is not very different from the previous one. Berkhof writes:

General revelation hinges on the nature and object of God’s revelation. General revelation is rooted in creation and in the general relations of God to man, and is addressed to man simply as creature and image-bearer of the Creator Special revelation is rooted in the redemptive plan of God, and is addressed to man as a sinner, revealing God’s plan for our salvation. The Bible is a redemptive book – it is God’s special revelation, from Genesis 3 onward.¹¹

How far can natural/general revelation take us?

This type of revelation objectively impacts fallen men and women universally and leaves them with heavy responsibility. Romans 1:18-20 properly accuses fallen people of ‘holding down the truth in unrighteousness, Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not

as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.'

This, one may contend, is the content of man's fall. Though man was given to know God they did not 'glorify' (*doxazo*) Him as God, neither were 'thankful' (*eucharisteo*). That is to say, man rejected his calling to be a 'doxological eucharistic being' (to use the words of Alexander Schmemmann). General revelation in creation (Ps. 19:1-6) was all that was initially necessary. After the Fall, however, man required more. The 'torah', the 'testimony', the 'statutes' and the 'commandments of the Lord' would, as we shall see, be the instruments given to 'convert the soul', 'make wise the simple', 'rejoice the heart' and 'enlighten the eyes' (Ps. 19:7-11). Yet, as man would reject these commands, he would be consumed in darkness such that he would be unable to 'understand his errors'. Having no ability to 'cleanse' himself 'from secret sins', he would not even be able to 'keep' himself 'back from presumptuous sins' that would 'have dominion' over him. Man's impasse would ultimately require the intervention of the LoRd Himself coming as His 'strength' and 'redeemer' (Ps. 19:12-13).

As Calvin puts it, 'Although the Lord represents himself and his everlasting kingdom in the mirror of his works with very great clarity, such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull to so many testimonies as they flow around us.'¹² This shows that we fallen creatures need something in addition to natural/general revelation to be put in the right with God.

The problem here is what theologians have called 'the noetic effects of sin'; that is, the fall has negatively impacted our minds and wills, so that we do not willingly see what is really there, especially as it concerns God's righteous lordship over us, and our need of forgiveness. To use an illustration from Calvin, sin has affected our eyesight, so that we need help to see clearly:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.¹³

Hence, special/supernatural revelation is called for if sinners are to be saved and brought into communion with the holy God.

While general revelation is fully true, we tend to misinterpret it, often in self-serving directions. Hence, special/supernatural revelation is needed for us to be established in absolutely certain knowledge. Berkhof has listed a four-fold purpose of special revelation:¹⁴

- (1) To correct and interpret the truth now gathered from general revelation.
- (2) To illumine man so that he can once more read the handwriting of God in nature.
- (3) To furnish man with the revelation of God's redemptive love.
- (4) To change his entire spiritual condition by redeeming him from the power of sin and leading him back to a life in communion with God.

There are three types of special revelation:

- (1) Theophanies (i.e. appearances of God): as in the glory cloud over the ark; the appearance to Job in stormy winds; the appearance to Elijah in the still, small voice; appearances in the form of angels, and supremely in the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ: '*The fullness of the Godhead bodily*' (Col. 1:19; 2:9). The Church is the manifestation of God (whose members are living stones; temples of the Holy Spirit). The Incarnation was the greatest theophany.
- (2) Direct communication: as when God speaks in an audible voice (to the boy Samuel, and the prophets after him); through the urim and thummim; through dreams (as to Joseph the patriarch in the Old Testament and Joseph the husband of Mary in the New); visions, as to Amos (the fruit basket and plumb line), Zechariah (horses); the Apocalypse (fires of hell; glories of heaven; beast from the sea and from the earth, etc.). This often proceeds by means of the inner illumination of the Spirit (cf. 1 John 2:20).
- (3) Miracles: These often confirmed the truth of the word of prophecy and pointed to who God is and to the kingdom He is bringing. The central miracle of all is the incarnation of the eternal Son of God in the flesh (including His death, resurrection and ascension), to restore the whole creation.

We may summarize **the contents of special revelation**:

They are above all, *redemptive*. John 17:3 shows the final result of the coming of the One who is the focus and power of all the redemptive process: ‘And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’

They are *historical*. Here they are profoundly unlike much of Eastern philosophy/religion (as Hinduism, Buddhism and Gnosticism), which seeks to escape space/time history into some sort of ideal realm. Christianity stands or falls in its connection and claims to the realities that actually took place in the world scene. The creation of all things out of nothing, the Flood, the calling of Abraham, the Virgin Birth, and the crucifixion and bodily resurrection of Christ took place in the real world of history, and as such, God was able to redeem that world. God gradually revealed His truth to His people; He prepared them to see more and more light, without their being blinded by its brightness.

They are *explained in words*. God spoke verbally to Adam, patriarchs, judges, prophets and apostles, and especially through His eternal Son in the flesh, Jesus Christ. He thereby explained the facts, He predicted the facts and saw that they were fulfilled. As Calvin writes:

But whether God became known to the patriarchs through oracles and visions or by the work and ministry of men, he put into their minds what they should then hand down to their posterity. At any rate, there is no doubt that firm certainty of doctrine was engraved in their hearts, so that they were convicted and understood that what they had learned proceeded from God....With this intent the law was published, and the prophets afterward added as its interpreters.¹⁵

What the Bible says about itself

Holy Scripture openly and frequently claims to be the very Word of God. In the creation week, what God calls something (that does not yet exist) He causes it to spring into being: ‘And God said, Let there be light: and there was light’ (Gen. 1:3). Then, throughout the rest of the Scriptures, God brings facts into being and speaks about them; giving promises and warnings and carrying them out. That is what happened with the Flood (cf. Gen. 6–9), and with the descendants of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth (cf. Gen. 10 and 11). God spoke, acted, and interpreted the meaning of it all. He called Abram (Abraham), and spoke words of grace to him about the future

(cf. Gen. 15:1; 17:1-2). He spoke to Isaac (cf. Gen. 26:24) and to Jacob (cf. Gen. 31:3; 48:3-4).

God told Moses His Name at the burning bush (Exod. 3:14) and called him to divine service (Exod. 3:15-22). God re-affirmed His covenant to Moses (Exod. 6:1-7:5). God called out of Egypt the children of Israel through Moses and instituted the Passover (Exod. 12-14). God spoke to Moses when the Israelites were murmuring against him (Exod. 16 and 17). God gave the ten commandments through Moses (Exod. 20:1-26; Deut. 5 and 6). God raised up the judges and spoke to them and through them (e.g. Judges 2:1-5: 'And an angel of the LoRd came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you').

He called the boy Samuel, who at first did not recognize His voice, until the old priest Eli told him to say: 'Speak, LoRd, for thy servant heareth' (1 Sam. 3:1-18). God continued to use Samuel as a mighty prophet and, after him, raised up other prophets till the end of the Old Testament. God spoke through King David, who also wrote many a Psalm. God spoke to David's son Solomon and made him great promises as he built the temple (cf. 1 Kings 6-9).

God continued speaking through the prophets of Israel. Sometimes they *heard* words (cf. e.g. Isa. 6:8; 50; 51; 55:11-13; 56; Jer. 1:2; 21:1, 2), and sometimes they *saw* words (cf. e.g. Ezek. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Hab. 1:1; Zech. 2 and 3). The prophets often said, 'Thus saith the Lord' (or 'the Lord said unto me', or 'For he saith'; or 'For the Lord sent a word').¹⁶ Christ, in His first sermon in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, takes up Isaiah 61:1, and applies it to Himself. Jeremiah often says: 'The word of the Lord came unto me ...'¹⁷ and 'Thus saith the Lord ...'¹⁸ One could multiply many more references.

As far as proof of the divine origin of the words of the prophets is concerned, the true prophets often say that if the predicted words do not come to pass, then the prophet who uttered them is a false prophet; he spoke it from himself, not from the Lord. Yet the opposite was the case with

young Samuel, of whom it is said: 'The LoRd was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground' (1 Sam. 3:19). When Elijah predicted that there would be no rain for over three years (cf. 1 Kings 17:1), that is exactly what took place. And when he called on the Lord to send rain, it came in abundance (1 Kings 18: 41-45).

Later, Elijah warned wicked king Ahab that if he went to war: '... in the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine' (1 Kings 21:19). However, according to the true prophet, Micaiah the son of Imla, God would not prosper this war, waged by Ahab and Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 19:19-40). But the mercenary court prophet, Zedekiah, predicted great success for the disobedient king (1 Kings 22:11). Micaiah knew the reason behind this false prophecy: 'And the LoRd said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so' (1 Kings 22:22).

The false teacher Zedekiah slapped the true prophet Micaiah, and the king of Israel commanded to put Micaiah in jail until the king returned after the battle. But with true prophecy, Micaiah said to the king: 'If thou return at all in peace, the LoRd hath not spoken by me. And he said, hearken, O people, every one of you' (1 Kings 22:28). The issue is clear: if the king had returned alive, then Micaiah would have been proven a false prophet, but if (as it turned out) the king was killed in the battle, then Micaiah was a true prophet.

This was an exemplification of the basic spiritual principle given in Deuteronomy 18:20-22:

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou shalt say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LoRd hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LoRd, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LoRd hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.

We are not given much information on how the prophets wrote down the words which they had pronounced. In Jeremiah 36, the Lord told Jeremiah to write in a book 'all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel

...' (Jer. 36:2). But verses 4-6 indicate that Jeremiah has his assistant Baruch write these words. When the arrogant king cut up the pages of the scroll with his pen knife and threw them one by one into the fire (Jer. 36:23), God told Jeremiah to have Baruch to write another roll, with even more words from the Lord (Jer. 36:27-32).

It is different with Ezekiel. God handed him, ready-made, an already written roll of a book (Ezek. 2:9-10). It is difficult to know how literally to take this, for in following verses (3:1-3), the prophet is told to eat this book. Earlier, the Lord told Isaiah to write: 'Moreover the LoRd said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it, with a man's pen concerning Mahershalalhashbaz, and I took unto faithful witnesses to record ...' (Isa. 8:1-2). He was instructed similarly in 30:8: 'Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever ...'

In Isaiah 38:9-22, we find 'The writing of Hezekiah'. In Isaiah 49, one sees the wonderful image of God's graving his people upon the palms of his hands.' Malachi speaks of 'the writing of a book of remembrance': 'Then they that feared the LoRd spake often one to another: and the LoRd hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LoRd, and that thought upon his name' (Mal. 3:16). We are told of the copying out of certain proverbs: 'These are also the proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah copied out' (Prov. 25:1).

In sum, though Scripture presents us with a variety of forms of direct revelation, we are not told given the methodological details about how the Bible was written. The most important observation is that God's words were given to a chosen community of faith, who knew them when they heard them.¹⁹ 'God does not reveal exactly how it is that immanent words are also transcendent words, nor how the reflections from within one limited and imperfect human culture are universally true and eternally binding. What he does is to give us the completed revelation of his Word to and through the believing community of Israel, with which the Church of God is in continuity.'²⁰

The New Testament provides a little more information on inspiration of the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:16: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' As B. B. Warfield has brought out, 'the Greek word in this passage – *theopneustos*... – very distinctly does not mean

“inspired of God”.... The Greek term has, however, nothing to say of *inspiring* or of *inspiration*: it speaks only of a “spiring” or “spiration.” What it says of Scripture is, not that it is “breathed into by God” or is the product of the Divine “inbreathing” into its human authors, but that it is breathed out by God, “God-breathed,” the product of the creative breath of God ... the Scripture is the product of a specifically Divine operation.’²¹

While the mystery of inspiration always remains, we are given further details in 2 Peter 1:19-21: ‘We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation, for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’

The verb in verse 21 – *pheromenoi* – means ‘being carried (or borne) along’ (present passive participle of the verb *phero*). It says that the prophets were not ‘moved’ or ‘carried’ by the ‘will of man’, but by the Holy Spirit. The picture is of the prophets being ‘lifted up’ and ‘carried along’, as they were thinking and writing, by the Spirit of God. Thus what they wrote was not a personal opinion (not of ‘any private interpretation’). It was not from self, but from God. They were writing under the determining influence of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the very words they wrote were from God. Their personalities were literally ‘carried along’ by the Holy Spirit so that their personal beings at that point were so under God’s influence that the result of their thinking and writing was the exact word of God. They did not become less than human or less than sentient, thinking persons. Rather they were so infused by the Spirit of God that, from beginning to end, their writing produced exactly what God wanted in terms of thoughts and precise words. The initiative, the burden, and the energy belonged to God, and they were totally caught up in this divine/human process. That is as much an explanation as we will ever be given.

Warfield addresses the objection that we cannot finally get the pure Word of God since it has to pass through human personality. The idea is that pure sunlight, in passing through the stained-glass window of a cathedral, is changed by the various colors in the glass before it strikes the stone floor (that is, the personality of the writer discolours the original divine word). He answers:

But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? What if the word of God that comes to his people is framed by God into the word of God it is, precisely by means of the qualities of the men framed by him for the purpose, through which it is given? ... Then he prepares a man, by birth, training, experience, gifts of grace, and if need be, of revelation, capable of appreciating this historical development and eager to search it out, thrilling in all his being with its lessons and bent upon making them clear and effective to others When we give due place in our thoughts to the universality of the providential government of God, to the minuteness and completeness of its sway, and to its invariable efficacy, we may be inclined to ask what is needed beyond this mere providential government to secure the production of sacred books which should be in every detail absolutely accordant with the Divine will.²²

Elsewhere, Warfield shows the high estimate of the Old Testament Scriptures held by the writers of the New Testament in an article: "*It Says:*" "*Scripture Says:*" "*God Says:*":

In one of these classes of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if they were God; in the other, God is spoken of as if he were the Scriptures: in the two together, God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them.²³

Jesus' View of Scripture

In Jesus' teaching and conversation, not least concerning who He is, He appeals to the Scriptures as the final authority. When the Jews accused Him of 'making himself God' (John 10:33), He answered by taking them back to Scripture: 'Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?' Here He is quoting Psalm 82:6. He goes on: 'If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou

blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father; believe me not' (John 10:34-37).

After His baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. All of His answers to the solicitations of the devil to do wrong were based on the Scriptures: particularly, He used Deuteronomy 8:3, 4; 6:13, and 6:16. In Matthew 4:4, 7, 10, He answered the devil all three times with the words: 'It is written.'

In his first sermon, given at His hometown synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus preached on the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 61:1,2), and directly applied it to himself (cf. Luke 4:16-30). When He did so, He said: 'Today is this scripture fulfilled in your ears' (Luke 4:21). In the final days of His passion, He often reminded His disciples that certain events must transpire 'that the scripture might be fulfilled' (Mark 14:49; John 13:18; 17:12). In Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27, He said, 'All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written' He explains to His disciples that He would accept the terrible things He is soon to go through, for otherwise how 'how should the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?' (Matt. 26:54). In John 5:39, He said to the opposing Jews, 'Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.'

Jesus indicates that the rejection of the Messiah had already been prophesied in scripture: 'And have ye not read this scripture: The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes' (Mark 12:10, 11, quoting Psalm 118:22, 23). When the children waved their palms and shouted Hosanna in His triumphal entry to Jerusalem, He said to the angry Jews: 'Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?' (Matt. 21:16). He said elsewhere to those who opposed Him: 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures' (Matt. 22:29; cf. Mark 12:24).

When He answered the Pharisees, who questioned Him about reasons for divorce, He took them to Genesis 2:24, as the final authority: 'Have ye not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh? ... What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder' (Matt. 19:4). Clearly, Jesus sees God as the author of marriage, as shown in this passage.

Some scholars have sought to evacuate the testimony of Christ to the divine authority of scripture by saying that He was a child of His time, and

such that He simply acted in accordance with the Jewish religious thought. Certainly, His view of scripture was high: in the only recorded episode we have from His childhood, He is found within the Temple sitting ‘in the midst of the teachers of the Law’ (*didaskaloi*, Luke 2:46). Once His ministry begins and He is teaching in the Temple, He responds to the Pharisees’ question concerning the veracity of His incarnation with the words ‘David himself said in the Holy Spirit ...’ (quoting Psalm 110 in Mark 12:36). When He is upon the very Cross itself, His final words echo scripture: In the horror of His suffering He quotes the 22nd Psalm, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46, cf. Ps. 22:1), and in His dying breath He utters Psalm 31: ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit’ (Luke 23:46, cf. Ps. 31:5).

So during every period of His life, His view of scripture was high, and it was just as high after the glory of His resurrection: after His resurrection, He was not to be written off as a mere child of His time, for He had been glorified, as He went into the very presence of the Father, and when He came back, His view of the scriptures was as high as ever. We see this in Luke 24, when on ‘Easter Sunday’ afternoon, He (in an unrecognizable form at first) joined two disciples on the Emmaus road, and asked why they were so cast down? They replied that it was because they had hoped in Jesus to redeem them, but He had been crucified, although some claimed they had seen Him alive. His first response to them was to take them at once to the scriptures. He began with a rebuke: ‘O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?’

Then He immediately opens the scriptures and showed how they prophesied accurately what He had just been through: ‘And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself’ (Luke 24:27). In His risen state, He sends them directly back to the scriptures as readily as He did before His crucifixion.

As Courthial notes: ‘The Church, the New Israel, did not receive the neo-testamentary tradition as something independent from the divine tradition handed down in writing by ancient Israel. Rather, the holy writings of ancient Israel, as already contained in the three parts of the Hebraic Bible: the *Torah*, the *Nevi'im*, and the *Ketuvim*, were understood as finding their ultimate completion in the neo-testamentary tradition, in which they were affirmed, deepened, and transfigured ...’²⁴

Circular Reasoning

To depend on the Holy Scriptures as our final authority is, in a certain sense, a sort of logical circular reasoning: that is, we rest upon the Word of God that claims to be the Word of God written. But given that this is a final authority, that is the only proper way to do it. As T. F. Torrance has written:

In this circular procedure we are not operating with a vicious circle, begging the question, or falling into the fallacy of a *petitio principii*. On the contrary, we are avoiding the grave mistake of retreating from the reality of God's trinitarian self-revelation, and moving outside of it in order to argue from some starting point of our own choosing or some alleged ground above or beyond the Holy Trinity from which the truth and validity of the doctrine of the Trinity may be judged. That would be in fact to deny that God is God, that he constitutes in himself the transcendent ground which we cannot know or understand in any way except in and through himself. It would be just as fallacious as attempting to justify ultimates in terms of what is not ultimate....What we are concerned with in theological elucidation and formulation in any coherent system of thought operating with ultimate axioms or beliefs cannot be justified or derived from any other ground than that which they themselves constitute.²⁵

In other words, when one is dealing with an ultimate authority, one has to base one's final reasoning upon that which is ultimate, for nothing stands above it by which to justify it. In another place, Frame adds: 'It is true that Scripture is our ultimate standard – the covenant constitution of the people of God. And an ultimate standard cannot be proved by any other standard than itself. But the circularity does not render the argument unpersuasive. We do not say merely that "the Bible is the Word of God because it is the Word of God," although that is strictly true. But we recognize the specific ways in which Scripture attests itself, by presenting content that is wonderfully persuasive and cogent.'²⁶

The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit to Scripture

Whether circular or not, people will not believe that scripture is the Word of God until something happens inside of them. John Calvin called it 'the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit'. 'The same Spirit, therefore, who has

spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.’²⁷ He goes on to write: ‘For even if it [i.e. the self-authenticating Word written] wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit.’²⁸

The teaching is plain: the Holy Spirit is not making up some deficiency in scripture. Not at all. Rather He is making up a deficiency in the hearers of the Word. In a sense, He is continuing to reverse the ‘noetic effects of sin’, which keep us blind and deaf to the will and presence of God. The scriptures are as objectively true before we receive them as after we receive them. The change is not in the written Word – remarkably, it is in us.

The Holy Spirit who brings about the new birth is not finished with us, when we mysteriously hear something whose origin is beyond our telling (cf. John 3:8). He continues to open our eyes and hearts to grasp with gladness and insight the Word of God. By His ministrations in this hearing, we intuitively perceive that this is the very voice of our God! Our hearing of the word of our Father is not unrelated to our direct knowledge of our adoption by Him (cf. Rom. 8:14-17). Calvin describes it:

Such, then, is a conviction that requires no reasons; such a knowledge with which the best reason agrees – in which the mind truly reposes more securely and constantly than in any reasons; such, finally, a feeling that can be born only of heavenly revelation. I speak of nothing other than that what each believer experiences within himself – though my words fall beneath a just explanation of the matter.²⁹

The first chapter of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (‘Of the Holy Scripture’) expresses this with pastoral clarity:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet

notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts (paragraph 5).

The Canon of Scripture

‘Canon’ is a Greek word which essentially means ‘established list’, or ‘measure’, ‘rule’, or ‘norm’. This norm is apostolic. Michael Kruger writes: ‘Acts 1:22 describes the two main characteristics of apostles – namely that they must be present from the ‘beginning’ (*arxamenos*) and must be foundational witnesses (*martura*) to the resurrection. This forms a striking parallel with those “who from the beginning were eyewitnesses” in Luke 1:2 (compare Acts 10:37). Additionally, this same combination occurs in John 15:27, when Jesus describes his disciples, “And you will also bear witness (*martureite*), because you have been with me from the beginning (*ap’ arxas*).”’³⁰ In other words, some things did cease after the completion of the careers of the apostles, and one of them was the writing of Holy Scripture. On this nearly every Christian is agreed.

The main questions concerning its background are raised by F. F. Bruce: ‘How did the New Testament itself as a collection of writings come into being? Who collected the writings, and on what principles? What circumstances led to the fixing of a list, or *canon*, of authoritative books?’³¹

In a sense, the mode of canonization appears to be analogous to that of the mode of inspiration. We are given very little definite information on the ‘how’ of either. But what does seem to be clear is this: the people of God over the generations have been led to recognize the ‘canonicity’ of a book on the basis of its inspiration. In the words of E. J. Young:

... that which determines the canonicity of any book is the book’s inspiration. A book which is inspired of God, therefore, is *ipso facto* canonical. Furthermore, the book is canonical whether it is bound up with other canonical books or not. It is God who sets limits to the canon and not man. Due, however, to God’s providential leading and due to the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of his people, the people of God have been enabled to recognize his Word. And remarkable indeed, has been the unanimity of their witness to the identity of the canon.³²

Although one might question some of his ideas, Meredith Kline seems to have a good point in *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, where he connects the idea of canon of Scripture with the binding covenant. Ancient covenant treaties were carefully written down and deposited in a safe place so that the people could be aware of the obligations, privileges, promises and threats, and this was the case with the Abrahamic and Mosaic and Davidic Covenants in the Pentateuch, historical books and prophets, and with the New Covenant in the New Testament (taking up Jeremiah 31). Hence in the early church the idea of canon was subsumed under the broader concept of covenant. That is, inspired instructions from the divine Giver of the covenant are, by definition, canonical.

We must first look at what little we can gather concerning the history of the Old Testament canon, and then at the New Testament canon. Our task with the Old Testament is somewhat easier than with the New. As E. J. Young wrote: 'From the Lord's references to the Old Testament it is possible to determine the extent of the canon which he recognized. He quoted abundantly, and the nature of his quotation often lends its sanction not only to the book in which the quotation is found, but even to the entire collection itself.'³³

But what was the precise canon of (Old Testament) Scripture recognized by Christ? To refer again to Young: 'There is every reason for believing that the canon of Christ and the canon of the Jews of his day were identical. There is no evidence whatever of any dispute between him and the Jews as to the canonicity of any Old Testament book. What Christ opposed was not the canon which the Pharisees accepted but the oral tradition which would make the canon void. From statements in Josephus and the Talmud, it is possible to learn the extent of the Jewish canon of Christ's day.'³⁴

From what Christ said after His resurrection, as He was walking down the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:44, He recognized three divisions of the Old Testament, and asserted that each of these had to be fulfilled in Him: '... all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.' The law of Moses refers to the first five books of the Bible; the prophets include both the major prophets and probably the minor prophets, as well as the historical books, and the third division is called 'the Psalms'. This is more complex to trace. It obviously includes the Psalms of David, but also involves other books as well, which are sometimes called 'Writings' or 'Hagiographa'.

The third division or ‘Hagiographa’ appears to have been collected on the principle that its writers, although inspired by God, did not occupy the official status of a prophet. As E. J. Young explains:

Some of the authors, however, such as David and Daniel did possess the prophetic gift, although not occupying the official status of prophet. This accounts for the fact that a book such as Daniel is found, not among the prophets, but among the Writings. The official status of Daniel, as a careful study of the Old Testament will reveal, was not that of prophet, but of statesman. Daniel, however, did possess the gift of prophecy.³⁵

The threefold division of the canon of the Old Testament to which Christ referred was mentioned some hundred and thirty years earlier in the prologue to *Ecclesiasticus* (‘the law itself, the prophecies, and the rest of the books’). It is possible that Ezra may have collected these books into one scroll (i.e. those that had been composed up to his time), but what we can be sure of is that the people of God recognized the marks of divinity upon the various writings that were accepted as scriptural, whoever collected them or whenever they were collected.

According to the Talmud, among some of the rabbis in the late inter-testamental period, there were questions raised concerning the canonicity of certain books (marked by the term whether it ‘defiled the hands’. If it ‘defiled the hands’, it was canonical): these books were Esther and Ecclesiastes.³⁶ E. J. Young is probably right that ‘It is questionable whether these disputes were really more than academic’. ³⁷ Theories of a Jewish synod at Jamnia (or Jabneh) sometime after Jerusalem was destroyed in a.d. 70, as having determined the Old Testament canon, do not seem to be well grounded.³⁸ The Old Testament canon was fixed long before that time and was authenticated by Christ.

But why were the books of the Apocrypha not recognized by the Jews, nor by the Christian Church, until a few of these books were accepted by the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century? As W. H. Green stated in his *General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon* (1898), these books were not traditionally regarded as divinely inspired. To quote Young again:

There are no marks in these books which would attest a divine origin. Both Judith and Tobit contain historical, chronological, and geographical errors. The books justify falsehood and deception, and make salvation to depend upon works of merit....Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon inculcate a morality based upon expediency. Wisdom teaches the creation of the world out of pre-existent matter (11:17).... the books show themselves at points to be at variance with divinely revealed truth. They were consequently never adopted by the Jews as canonical.³⁹

Although the Christian Church (and the Jewish people before them) rejected the Apocryphal books as to divine inspiration, the same Church seems to have received in most cases, apparently almost immediately, the New Testament books as coming from the very mouth of God. As we shall see, there were some exceptions to this almost immediate recognition of particular New Testament writings, and all in all, the historical process is difficult to discern in detail, owing to lack of literary evidence bearing on the question. Yet we can at least trace a basic outline of some of the major steps in the process of the recognition and collection of the New Testament canon.

We have already discussed the main issues involved in the inspiration of the New Testament, based on the absolute authority of Christ and His communication of a significant portion of that authority to His apostles. The church recognized that when the apostles spoke or wrote in authoritative situations, it was the Lord Himself who was communicating through them. And in some cases, persons who are often termed 'apostolic men' (but were not actual apostles) were also chosen by God to write Scripture, and their writings were perceived by the people of God to bear the marks of inspiration (Mark, for instance, who was an associate of Peter, and wrote the Gospel of Mark).

But whether the penman was an actual apostle or the understudy or other associate of an apostle, the touchstone of whether or not a specific work was canonical or not was in every case its inspiration or lack of it. As N. B. Stonehouse explained:

If the writings of Mark and Luke are to be judged canonical, it must be because these evangelists were controlled by the Spirit of the Lord in such a manner that their writings, and not merely the apostolic message which they

set forth, are divine. In other words, it is Mark's inspiration (which, to be sure, is not to be isolated from his historical qualifications), and not Peter's inspiration, which provided the finally indispensable ground for the acceptance of that book as canonical.⁴⁰

We do not know exactly how soon the full quota of twenty-seven New Testament books was collected together and recognized as a unity. What we do know for certain is that as early as c. a.d. 95, several of the New Testament writings were quoted in *I Clement*, a letter from the Bishop of the Church at Rome to the Church at Corinth. Clement speaks of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians as having been given 'with true inspiration' (I Clement 47:1-3). Some twenty years later (c. 115), Polycarp spoke in the same context in one of his letters of both Psalms and Ephesians as Scripture. About the same time, Ignatius of Antioch in his letters quotes many New Testament writings and speaks of the Gospel as the fulfillment of prophecy and 'the perfection of incorruption'.⁴¹ Ignatius taught that the proclamations of the apostles possess the same authority as that of the Lord.⁴²

A very important point emerges from the writings of Ignatius for the history of the New Testament canon: he speaks (as early as a.d. 115) of a collection of the epistles of Paul, which he regarded as authoritatively apostolic.⁴³ Sometime between 115 and about 145 or 150, Papias of Asia Minor wrote concerning the composition of the Gospels. He used the same expression – 'oracles of the Lord' – which was regularly used to designate the oracular character of the Old Testament.⁴⁴

The Apologist Justin Martyr, who was writing about the year 160, made copious quotations from both Old and New Testaments, and treated them as being on the same high level of divine authority. He said: 'Christ is the new law and the new covenant.'⁴⁵ In his *First Apology*, he states: 'For the apostles in the memoirs which were composed by them, which are called gospels, thus delivered unto us what was commanded them.'⁴⁶ Then he speaks of the Sunday liturgical reading of both Old Testament and these memoirs in the Christian worship services, with no indication of any difference of authority or inspiration between them. In his *Dialogue* he frequently introduces Gospel quotations with the same formula with which he quotes the Old: 'It is written.' He mentions the apostles as being the spokesmen of the Lord in the new dispensation as prophets were in the

Old.⁴⁷ Justin also acknowledged the Revelation of John as apostolic and divine revelation.⁴⁸

The famous liberal scholar of nineteenth-century Germany, Harnack, suggested that the Christian Church first became concerned about the canon as late as the year 175, when the heretic Marcion excised many books from his version of the New Testament. There may be some truth here, but it is certain that the Church was concerned about its collection of authoritative books well before this date, as we have just seen. Yet it may be true that Marcionism, and also the Pentecostalist sect of Montanism (which claimed new revelation alongside the New Testament Scriptures), hastened the Church's wider clarification and publication of the inspired canon which it had recognized, with very few exceptions, for decades.

At any rate, according to scholars such as F. F. Bruce, by the beginning of the second century, there is evidence for the circulation of two collections of Christian writings in the Church.⁴⁹ The four Gospels circulated in one collection, and the Pauline corpus in another. Bruce states:

As the Gospel collection was designated by the Greek word *Euangelion*, so the Pauline collection was designated by the one word, *Apostolos*, each letter being distinguished as 'To the Romans,' 'First to the Corinthians,' and so on. Before long, the anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews was bound up with the Pauline writings. Acts, as a matter of convenience, came to be bound up with the 'General Epistles' (those of Peter, James, John, and Jude).

1. See Exod. 12:17, 24-25; 13:10, 15:26, 19:5; Num. 3:7-8; 4:23, 30, 37, 41, 47; 8:11, 15, 19, 22.

2. Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 20:2, 33:20, 89:19. 121:1-2, etc.

3. In *Institutes*, I. XIII. 21, Calvin quotes Hilary: 'Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself. For as Hilary says, he is the one fit witness to himself, and is not known except through himself [from *De Trinitate* I.xviii].'

4. Speaking of the breeze blowing in the Garden in the time of Adam, Calvin writes (of the breath of air striking Adam as a sign of the Lord's approach): 'For since he is in himself incomprehensible, he assumes, when he wishes to manifest himself to men, those marks by which he may be known' (*Commentary on Genesis*, chapter III, p. 8).

5. Calvin, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, Chapter II, p. 7.

6. Calvin, *Institutes* I. XIII. 1.
7. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 126.
8. Ibid.
9. Calvin, *Institutes* I. V. 1.
10. Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, p.24.
11. Ibid., p. 25.
12. Calvin, *Institutes* I. V. 12.
13. Ibid., I. V. 1.
14. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1939), p. 32.
15. Ibid., I. vi, p. 2.
16. Isaiah 3:16; 8:1, 5,11; 9:8; 10:13; 18:4; 21:16; 22:15; 28:16; 30:15; 31:4; 37:6; 38:1; 40:1; 42:5; 44:2; 45:1; 49:5-26; 56:1-2.
17. Jeremiah 1:2, 4, 7, 11, 13; 2:1; 9:15; 11:1; 13:3,6, 8; 14:1; 16:1; 18:1, 5; 21:1; 22:1, 3, etc.
18. Jeremiah 2:5; 4:3; 6:9; 7:3, 20; 9:15, 23; 13:1, 9; 14:10; 15:1; 16:14; 17:5; 19:1, 25:15, 32, 26:1, 27:1; 28:16, etc.
19. I have discussed this elsewhere: ‘*The Triune God Makes himself known in the Covenant of Grace*’, Chapter Six, Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Vol. One*, pp. 387-446.
20. Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology, Vol. One*, p. 423.
21. B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 132, 133.
22. B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations*, pp. 66-69.
23. B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 299.
24. Courthial, *A New Day of Small Beginnings*, p. 160.
25. T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*, pp. 27, 28. In a somewhat similar fashion, John Frame, in discussing God’s omnipotence, writes: ‘The definition is circular, as ultimately, are all definitions of divine attributes. But the circle need not be a *narrow* circle. For we learn of God’s nature through his revelation, which is rich in content’ (*Systematic Theology*, p. 343).
26. John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 273.
27. Calvin, *Institutes*, I. VII. 4.
28. Ibid., I. VII. 5.
29. Ibid.
30. Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon* (IVP Academic: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2013), p. 140.
31. F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (IVP: London, 1966), p. 21.
32. E. J. Young, in Stonehouse and Wooley, eds. *The Infallible Word* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company: Philadelphia, 1947), p. 74.
33. Ibid., p. 60.
34. Ibid., p. 62, note 3.
35. Ibid., p. 70.
36. See Zeitlin, *An Historical Study of the Canonization of the Holy Scriptures* (1953), p. 19.
37. E. J. Young, op. cit., p. 72.
38. H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament* (London, 1950), p. 170.

39. E. J. Young in C. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 167-68.
40. N. Stonehouse in Stonehouse and Wooley, op. cit., p. 119.
41. Ignatius, *Philadelphians*, 9.2.
42. Ignatius, *Philadelphians*, 5:1-2; *Magnesians* 13:1; *Trallians* 12:2; *Ephesians* 11:2.
43. Ignatius, *Ephesians*, p. 12.
44. Stonehouse and Wooley, op. cit., p. 132.
45. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, p. 11.
46. Justin, *First Apology*, p. 66.
47. Justin, *Dialogue*, p. 119.
48. Ibid., p. 81.
49. Bruce, op. cit., p. 23.

PART THREE

LIVING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

CHAPTER 12

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Christ draws us and all believers into vital union with Himself for all eternity. Thereby we are crucified with Him, raised with Him, and share His service to the Father, as well as His glory. His life, light, and love are all multiplied within us, and shine out to others.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, and in accordance with the Word of God written, sinners are brought into a wonderful new sphere of existence: the Christian life. We have already referred to Calvin's encapsulation of this supernatural event for all who are to be saved for all eternity, and it bears repetition:

As long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us...until we grow into one body with him. It is true that we obtain this by faith. Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.¹

Given the self-enclosed nature of our lives as descendants of fallen Adam, it would be hard to believe the wonderful reality of stepping by vital faith into a relationship of everlasting joy and peace with the Lord, unless we ourselves had experienced it, along with countless millions of other sinners across the world of space and time. We are saved, not merely as individuals, but into a lively body of believing brothers and sisters, whose head is the risen Christ. He interpenetrates us with His own holy and triumphant life, now and for evermore. Hence our true life is established, not in self, but in Another, and thus our existence is guaranteed for an eternity of bliss. As a hymn says:

Throughout the universe of bliss
The centre Thou, and sun,

The eternal theme of praise is this,
To heaven's beloved One:
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou,
That every knee to Thee should bow!

In the same way, Paul writes: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

Staniloae sums it up:

Reduced to a pure subjectivity that is changing and capricious, I am no longer sure of myself if I no longer mean anything for anyone else. I know that I exist and receive the assurance of salvation and eternal life because the Son of God became man – my fellow man – and because He unites me with Himself, not individually and nor working within my purely subjective interior but within the 'body' of believing humanity, which consists of souls clad in bodies. He thus places me in a new light and gives a sure consistency to my reality which is constituted of soul and body, and is activated and realized through relational acts with other human beings. I become real to the maximum degree in Christ, because all are real in him and because we are real together.²

Thus, 'our lives are hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3). The New Testament frequently speaks of our being in Christ (e.g. Rom. 6:3-6), and of Christ being in us (e.g. Col. 1:27); it is the same blessed state of reality looked at from different points of view. It is a revelation of God's Son in us (e.g. Gal. 1:16). This has occurred through the sending forth of the Spirit into our hearts (Gal. 4:6). There, in the depths of our being, the Holy Spirit has shed abroad the love of God (Rom. 5:5). We are 'saved *in* his life' or '*by* his life' (Rom. 5:10).

Faith gives entrance

Romans 10:8-10 shows that we come into this resurrection life of Christ through faith:

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the word of faith, which we preach: That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:17).

Jesus said unto her [Martha], I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world (John 11:25-27).

In the Gospel of John, there is no occurrence of the noun for faith (*pistis*). The word 'believe' (*pisteuo*), however, occurs 99 times. So to the man born blind whom He healed, Jesus later said (after having found him):

Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him (John 9:35-38).

In John 14:1-4, Jesus said:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God,³ believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 unto myself: that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Raised with Christ

Believing faith works in us as by the Spirit as a sort of resurrection (first, in our spirit, and later, in our body): 'But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead

shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you' (Rom. 8:11). The risen Christ on Easter Sunday evening blessed in this way His disciples: 'And when he has said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost ...' (John 20:22).

Paul says: 'Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our body' (2 Cor. 4:10); 'Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you' (2 Cor. 4:14). 'As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed' (2 Cor. 6:9). 'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light' (Eph. 5:14).

In the middle of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1, he prays, among other petitions, that believers may know 'what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places ...' (vv. 19, 20).

Shared Glory

It is a sharing of the glory enjoyed by the Father and the Son:

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:22, 23).

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you ... (1 Pet. 4:14).

Colossians 1:27 says: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'

This glorious relationship is so close that the very characteristics of Christ take root in, and burst forth from His people, as the Holy Spirit shapes and empowers their personalities from the inside out. This is why 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law' (Gal. 5:22, 23). These qualities show the very glory of God. Thus, as Paul said: 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21).

In the Old Testament era, the glory of God at times filled the Tabernacle and Temple. It can be thought of as a foreshadowing of the Christian life, in

which the believer experiences the glorious reality of the indwelling of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Peter calls it our *theosis*. In it, we partake of God Himself, in a way appropriate to sanctified creatures.

Baptized into Christ

This supernatural joining to Christ, and to the Father, is spoken of as a particular sort of 'baptism' by Paul. 'For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:13), and also Romans 6:3-7 (e.g. 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ...'); 'Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead ...' (Col. 2:12).

Written by Christ in the heart

God Himself performs this baptism in the Holy Spirit, and it is transformative of the lives of those who are subject to it. Only God can write the realities of this transformed existence onto the human heart (although He uses the ministry of His Church as part of the process): 'Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistles of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart ...' (2 Cor. 3:2, 3).

Grafted into Christ

Several crucial verses show that true Christianity is not only a theological understanding of truths about Christ and us, but is an actual insertion into His body.

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:5).

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, ... (Rom. 11:17).

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the

corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:4).

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb. 2:11).

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:7-9).

Imitation of Christ

As has often been said, a great deal of the New Testament ethic is based on our living out who we are in Christ. Born-again people are not called to act contrary to their new natures, but to live them out. No small part of that consists in seeking to follow Christ. Jesus told us in John 15:14: 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' After all, in John 8:31-32 He had already told them, 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' How will this happen? In John 17:20-21 we hear Jesus' prayer to the Father: 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.'

The Apostle Peter presents the Christian life in truly transformative terms: 'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth' (1 Pet. 2:21-22). And then the next three chapters of 1 Peter specify what sort of behavior is pleasing to Christ, and thus, comes from him. Chapter 3 lists willing subjection of the wife to the husband (3:1-6); gracious consideration of the wife by the husband (3:7); compassion, courtesy (v. 8); refusal to return evil for evil (vv. 9-10); enthusiastic avoidance of evil and seeking of good (v. 11); awareness of the eyes of God being upon us (v. 12); refusal to live in fear of evil people (vv. 13-14); determination to think first of God, and the keeping of a good conscience (v. 16), and the willingness to suffer for doing right, if and when called for (v. 17).

Chapter 4 calls for being controlled by the mind of Christ (4:1-2), especially when it comes to stopping excessive behavior, such as alcohol abuse and wild parties (vv. 3-7). Much prayer is mandated (v. 7), and above all, the sort of fervent love that covers the sins of others (v. 8); also generous hospitality (v. 9), and general conversation that is in accordance with the holy scriptures. This chapter forearms us so that we are equipped for suffering for righteousness' sake (vv. 12-16; 5:8-9) but warns us against having to suffer because we have done wrong (v. 15). If we have to suffer, we are instructed to commit the whole matter to God (v. 19), which will leave no room for bitterness. The next chapter (5) summarizes these holy requirements in terms of humility and mutual subjection (vv. 5-6), and especially, keeping one's eyes of faith on the Lord, who is able to lift us up at the right time (vv. 4-7).

Similarly, in Colossians 3, Paul shows the kinds of attitudes and actions that come from 'being risen with Christ' (v. 1): 'If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God ...' (Col. 3:1-3). Then we are told what to mortify, and what to follow:

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry But now put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not to one another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even so as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness ... (vv. 5-14).

Paul then also gives instructions for husbands, wives and children (vv. 18-21), and he teaches how to honor one's masters (v. 22). He requires of the followers of Christ much prayer (4:2, 3); and purity and graciousness in speech (4:6). Possibly, the supreme attribute of practical Christianity may

be the hardest of all to follow: ‘Esteem others better than yourselves’ (Phil. 2:3).

Even more broadly, John teaches us to follow what Jesus said, concerning the entire focus of our lives: ‘as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.’ Then Jesus shows the broad scope of this in Matthew 28:19: ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always.’

The divine powers that constitute and break forth from Christian experience

The Lord gave John a vision of the sovereign throne in heaven: ‘And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb ...’ (Rev. 22:1). The divine waters of that river brought forth fruitfulness and healing wherever it went (Rev. 22:2). Instead of the curse for sin, there was face-to-face fellowship, one of the goals of life (vv. 3, 4), and instead of darkness, light (v. 5).

We could summarize these holy waters from God to His people as consisting in life, light, and love. These God-derived realities are the bases of the Christian life and are always breaking through it to impart its blessings outwards, so as to make others alive around it, as does a life-giving river. In the words of a hymn by William C. Doane:

O Holy Ghost, the Lord and the Life Giver,
Thine is the quickening power that gives increase;
From Thee have flowed, as from a pleasant river,
Our plenty, wealth, prosperity and peace.

Regarding these transformative qualities from this river of living water as (1) Life, (2) Light, and (3) Love, we see that when we speak of one, we at the same time speak of the others. They are not, at the end of the day, very different, or at least, one could say that they are not separated.

(1) Life

Of Christ, the Prologue to John’s Gospel says: ‘In him was life; and the life was the light of men’ (John 1:4). Jesus said to the bereaved Martha: ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead,

yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?' (John 11:25). Speaking of His sheep, the Lord said: 'And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand' (John 10:28).

The triune God, JHVH the LoRd (Exod. 3:14), is the ever-living One. He is life and depends on nothing outside Himself to be the eternally self-sufficient being that He is.⁴ He imparts life as He will, to whomsoever He will. As the eternal Son of God in the flesh said in His high priestly prayer: 'As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him ...' (John 17: 2). John calls this life: eternal. To say that it is '*eternal*' means at least two related things: (1) it never ends, and (2) it shares in the qualities of God's own existence, in a way appropriate for creatures.

(1) As Leon Morris writes: 'The Jews divided time into the present age and the age to come, but the adjective ... means "the life proper to the age to come".... But as the age to come is never thought of as coming to an end, the adjective came to mean "everlasting"...' ⁵

(2) While it clearly meant 'not coming to an end', it also meant far more than that piece of good news (for those of us who are facing physical death). It meant above all, the sharing in the very life of God, which the infinite Creator allows the finite creature to do in an appropriate way for creatures (cf. 2 Peter 1:4: 'Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.'). Thus their lives will be characterized by purity (2 Pet. 1:4-5); by virtue and (godly) knowledge (2 Pet. 1:5); by self-control, patience, and godliness (2 Pet. 1:6), and by brotherly kindness and by charity (love) (2 Pet. 1:7).

In a word, it is direct knowledge of Christ: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). Their lives are now 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3), so that they can truly say: 'For me to live is Christ' (Phil. 1:21), and 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20). Obviously, this 'knowledge' means personal relationship.

(2) *Light*

We know that God is light (e.g. John 8:12; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 21:23; 22:5). He dwells in light inapproachable (1 Tim. 6:16). On the first day of creation, 'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light' (Gen. 1:3). God immediately declared that light to be good (Gen. 1:4). He now sends forth His light in the miracle of regeneration (2 Cor. 4:6). Thus, we have been 'called out of darkness into his marvelous light' (1 Pet. 2:9). The rest of our lives as believers, we are to walk in the light, as Christ is in the light (cf. 1 John 1:7), for we are 'light in the Lord, and [thus] 'walk as children of light' (Eph. 5:8).

Paul connects the new creation (of a sinner in Christ's resurrection life) to the old creation: 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (2 Cor. 5:17). He also connects this living in the light with the spiritual resurrection given us by Christ in the new birth (v. 14). God had spoken light into the darkness of the primeval world in the early creation week. And the same triune God who *is* uncreated light, can creatively shine his light into the darkness of a human soul, transforming what was like a chaos into something more like a beautiful cosmos.

The instrument of transformation is the Word of God. This word found literal physical fulfillment in Genesis 1, and ever since, it finds equally real spiritual fulfillment when spoken into the human personality. 'The entrance of thy word giveth light' (Ps. 119:130). It then brings us to the right place: 'O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles' (Ps. 43:3). Once sent out, this word never returns void (Isa. 55:11).

God's light shines out from His holy character, and glitters with divine brightness from the Son who comes from Him, and from the Law that He enunciates in His written Word. In Colossians 3:4, Paul speaks of Christ as our life, and then in 3:16, he speaks of 'the word of Christ dwelling in you richly ...' Christ is in you, and His word is in you, directing your behavior in a godly fashion.

Life in the light involves purposely splitting with shameful things done in secret (cf. Eph. 5:11, 12). It is to live a sincere existence in the light, which makes what we are and what we do 'manifest' (Eph. 5:13). This means very careful (or 'circumspect') living, so as to show what 'the will of the Lord is' (Eph. 5:17). From that follows a refusal to abuse alcohol (Eph. 5:18), and in the place of some physical agent to stimulate us, a seeking of

the fulness of the Spirit. It is a life full of praise and song in the heart (v. 19); great thankfulness to the Lord (v. 20), and proper submission to one another in the fear of God (v. 21). It involves the appropriate submission of the wife to the husband (vv. 22, 23), and the self-sacrificial love of the husband to the wife (v. 25) – in which the husband loves the wife as he loves his own body (vv. 28, 29). This marital love shows the love of the Lord for His church (v. 32). These are ways of manifesting practically the truth Christ declared about Himself: ‘I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness’ (John 12:46).

(3) *Love*

The life of the ever-living God is one of infinite love, for ‘*God is love*’ (1 John 4:8).

The love of the Father to the Son, and the love of the Son to the Father, is caused to overflow in abundance by the Spirit in the believer, who is united to Christ in that major attribute of God: love – ‘And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ (Rom. 5:5). It is the first of the fruit of the Spirit: ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law’ (Gal. 5:22-23).

This love which comes from God, not only leads us back to love God, but also to love our brethren: ‘Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments’ (1 John 5:1-2). True love of God always carries with it love of others: ‘If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?’ (1 John 4:20).

This kind of love is also known as ‘kindness’. Among other beautiful qualities of kindness is a heart of mercy towards offenders, issuing in a readiness to forgive others: ‘And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you’ (Eph. 4:32). This love is a chief mark of what it means to be a Christian, and Jesus says that it is a mark that the world can read: ‘By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another’ (John 13:35).

This love requires supernatural strength from the God who is its source, for it enables us to go against our fallen human nature (which seeks revenge). Jesus tells us: ‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that despitefully use you, and persecute you ...’ (Matt. 5:43-44).

Love involves forgiveness

This is a sight the world is not used to seeing, and the influence it can have is past telling upon those who are controlled by selfishness and hatred themselves. In this kind of goodness to enemies, they see, in a consecrated human life, who God is: ‘That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? ... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect’ (Matt. 5:43-48).

All of this love – both to God and to others – comes from deep inside the born-again person; it comes from a profound inward desire to be pleasing to God, that was given them in regeneration. It is the essence of the New Covenant. It was predicted in its detail by Jeremiah (and later taken up in Hebrews).

Behold, the days come, saith the LoRd, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LoRd. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LoRd, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LoRd: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

Many of these exact words are taken up in Hebrews 8:6-13. Then it is explained that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who will carry this through, not

with animal blood, but with His own blood (cf. Heb. 9:11-14). He completed His work, not in the earthly temple, but in the higher place which it signified: the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:24). Through this final and supreme High Priest, we sinners – now purged with His blood – are invited into the highest place of all, to which we may come with a clear conscience: ‘And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water ...’ (Heb. 10:21-22). From that place we are enabled to ‘consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works ...’ (Heb. 10:24).

Willing forgiveness is a crucial part of the Christian life, because living in a sinful world, we offend others, and others offend us; sometimes when we are not even aware of it. When Simon Peter wondered if he should forgive a transgressor seven times, Jesus told him ‘seventy times seven’ (Matt. 18:22). After the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus emphasized the necessity of forgiveness, if our prayers are to be answered in a right relationship with God: ‘For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses’ (Matt. 6:14-15).

We can look at it this way: men’s sins against us (who are finite creatures) are finite. But our sins against God (who is infinite) are therefore infinite. It is an infinitely great thing to be forgiven of our guilt before the incomparably great God. So, the very least we can do (who have been forgiven of such infinite transgressions) is to forgive those other creatures who have sinned against us. It is, shows Jesus, impossible to live a life of pardon before God if we carry in our hearts refusal to forgive others. Jesus told a parable about this strange condition.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But inasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But that same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence:

and he took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt...[His fellowservants told the master about this]...Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all thy debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest thou also not have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And the lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses (Matt. 18:23-35).

We could all tell sad stories of the grief that reigns in homes where the members refuse to forgive one another. But instead of doing that, let me relate a true tale of forgiveness that supposedly happened within a family I heard about (but did not know personally) in North Carolina.

A father and his son got into a very nasty spat and determined never to speak to one another again. The son left home in an embittered atmosphere. Many months passed, and both father and son began to regret how they had acted and how they had parted. The son then left a message on the telephone answering machine. He said if the father wished him to come home, to put a white handkerchief on the mailbox (which was beside the heavily traveled Interstate Highway 95). Soon the son drove down that highway and looked at the mailbox. Instead of a handkerchief, there was a large white bed sheet draped over the box, and some sheets on the nearby fence! That is God's way. As Jesus said, offences will necessarily come (Matt. 18: 7), but we can do something about them. That is the way to a happy family life!

In most cases of offence, at least involving serious matters, we tend to hesitate to forgive, because it means we have to take pain to ourselves to do so. Even when we do so, we are likely to mull it over in our minds and think with hurtful disappointment about the one who asked for pardon. It is not unlike taking burning coals into our bosom (as Paul speaks of in a very different context – cf. Romans 12:20). But as we forgive those who have hurt us, we will find ourselves in the good company of Jesus, as we see in 1 Peter 2:21-25:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Forgiveness of others is like the re-building of a bridge, and that is part of what reconciliation is. This bridge can only be rebuilt on the basis of pardon, and to do so is to follow Jesus:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

1. Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 1. 1.

2. Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, pp. 54, 55.

3. The verb here could be either indicative or imperative.

4. For fuller details on Exodus 3:14, see Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, pp. 279-85.

5. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971), p. 227.

CHAPTER 13

COMMANDMENTS REGARDING OUR DUTY TO GOD

Much of Scripture comes in the form of ‘Torah’, which means law or teaching. The Torah is summarized in the ten commandments, and the first four of them teach us our duty to God, so that we may love and obey Him above all.

Much of Holy Scripture consists of the literary genre of Law. In Hebrew, ‘Torah’ can bear the meaning of ‘law’ (though it also has a broader meaning), so within Judaism, the Scriptures are often called ‘Torah’. Much of both Old and New Testaments consist of the giving of Law, the explication of Law, and numerous cases of Law. Indeed, without the concept of law, the Scriptures would be a good deal thinner. In this chapter, we will examine why so much space is given to the Law, ultimately grateful that obedience is possible as the ‘Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ dwells within us, implanting the Law in our hearts.

Since the sixteenth-century Reformation, led by Martin Luther, much of Protestantism has had a somewhat uneasy relationship with the Law of God. Luther made his point loud and clear, and in so doing transformed nearly half of northern Europe: we are justified by grace, through faith, he cried, we are not saved by law-keeping. Luther, in a real sense, truly rediscovered the gospel of grace, especially as he studied the Epistles of Galatians and of Romans. The world would never be the same. However, after the initial excitement of reform, important questions required attention – not least, what should the Christian life be like? Luther certainly sought to offer some answers, as in his famous 1520 Treatises: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, and *The Freedom of the Christian Man*. He did not totally discount the place of the law in Christian living, although grace – not law – was the basis of salvation. And that continued to be the mainstream position in most of Protestantism in the centuries following.

The emphasis of Luther's much younger colleague in the Reformation, John Calvin, was very different in spirit from that of Luther. Calvin had a higher regard for the usefulness of God's Law in true Christianity. While Luther always held at the forefront the negative function of the Law, Calvin (while never denying its condemnatory aspect), gave greater sway to its positive helpfulness than Luther ever did. In that positive regard, in his *Institutes*, John Calvin listed a three-fold usage of the moral law. (1) It shows God's righteousness, and in so doing, demonstrates our sin, and calls us to repentance.¹ (2) It restrains sin among the unregenerate, and thereby protects the community.² (3) It serves as a positive guide for the Christian life.³

Calvin's summation of the law has been supported by Philip S. Ross, who has carefully and extensively studied the threefold division of the law.⁴ He finds it to be biblically and theologically well-grounded in both Old and New Testaments. For example, in his discussion of the application of 1 Corinthians 9:8-10, which explains the relevance of Deuteronomy 25:4 ('Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn'), he notes: 'What God cares about are the deeper principles woven into the legal narrative and Paul seeks to express those principles. On the one hand, there must be honesty expressed in workers receiving a just reward: on the other hand, he will express contentment fulfilling his apostolic responsibilities while forgoing those rights (1 Cor. 9:15) ... It provides a vivid example of what the Westminster Divines understood by "general equity" [i.e. principles of fairness, integrity, and contentment].'⁵

Calvin demonstrated that the gospel did not supplant the law: 'But the gospel did not so supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows From this we infer that, where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation'⁶

Long before Calvin, Saint Thomas Aquinas saw that we needed a Mediator in order to be saved, so that even in the time of the 'Old Law', the fathers of the faith were nonetheless saved by grace: '*Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.* The Old Law could not save men on its own, but God did not fail men: together with the law he gave the saving help of faith in a go-between to come: faith in Christ saved our forefathers just as it saves us.'⁷

Chapter XIX of the 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith* ('Of the Law of God'), illustrates the biblical balance of Reformed Protestantism on God's Law. The Moral Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments which are for all people. These commandments remain in force (paragraph 5), but the judicial and ceremonial laws have been abrogated,⁸ according to paragraphs 3 and 4. Paragraph 6 extolls the great usefulness of God's law for the Christian life (although again, it is denied that it is a way of salvation), and paragraph 7 shows that salvation by grace and a life in accordance with the law 'do sweetly' comply with one another.

It will be worthwhile to quote the entire sixth paragraph:

Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet it is of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works: so as a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth to the other, is no evidence of his being under the law, and not under grace.

Granted then the Reformational vision of the beneficent function of God's Law, (more among the followers of Calvin than of Luther), it is now appropriate to look precisely at the details of how the Ten Commandments are given to shape the structure of the Christian life. Once again, we recall that the Law does not give the power for holy living; only the Holy Spirit does that, but it does lay out the pattern of godly existence and says with the Psalmist: 'O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day' (Ps. 119: 97), and with Jesus, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments' (John 14:15).

To refer again to Thomas Aquinas, he also, centuries earlier, emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit within the Christian as being *primary* (in the New Covenant administration), while the written aspects of the New phase of the law are *secondary*; his major emphasis is on the Holy Spirit's writing of the law inside the regenerate, as promised in Jeremiah 31:

The Law of the New Covenant is implanted in people's heart. The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will draw up a new covenant with the people of Israel: I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. The New Law is first and foremost the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Christ: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. What are the laws of God written by God himself in our hearts, Augustine asks, if not the very presence of the Holy Spirit? ...The New Law is first and foremost a law planted within, and only secondarily a written law.⁹

Since the Law is an expression of the character of God, it can be nothing but beautiful. Rather than an unbearable burden, Christ declares to us that His 'yoke is easy and burden is light' (Matt. 11:30). That is to say, this yoke unites us with Jesus, whose beauty is displayed in His meekness and lowliness of heart. As we submit ourselves to its burden, it draws us together with Him in exactly the right direction at exactly the right time. This is the sense of the word translated as 'easy' (*chrestos*). Derived from the verb, *chraomai*, it more literally means that which furnishes us with exactly what is most useful for forming us into the beautiful image of Christ, the 'brightness of the glory of God and the express image (*charakter*) of his Person' (Heb 1:3).

This is why John also can assure us that 'his commandments are not grievous' (1 John 5:3). As we walk in these commandments in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are walking in fellowship with God. They are more like wings than a heavy burden. If the fallen world system in which we must live inclines us constantly to deny the will of God by going in a self-serving direction, we remember that 'greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world' (1 John 4:4).

Commandments regarding our duties to God (or 'the first table of the Law'): 1–4)

The First Commandment

The first commandment shows that God is the basis of everything: of our very existence, our thought, our action, and our destiny: *‘And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me’* (Exod. 20:1-3).

In this pivotal text, the God of all creation is identified as the God who redeemed His people out of slavery in Egypt. Thus, the God of the universe, the God of creation, is also the God of redemption; the God of grace and mercy. By grace, He makes us His own inheritance: *‘But the LoRd hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day’* (Deut. 4:20).

Therefore, we are to live by his law, and to teach it to our children:

Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LoRd your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: that thou mightiest fear the LoRd thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son’s son all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it: that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily as the LoRd God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey (Deut. 6:1-3).

The Shema Israel

Immediately, these verses lead to the *Shema Israel*, which was the morning and evening prayer for God’s people, and which was to be communicated to the children over the generations:

Hear, O Israel: The LoRd thy God is one LoRd: And thou shalt love the LoRd thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up ... (Deut. 6:4-7).

This is the basis of the requirements in Deuteronomy 10:12, 13:

And now Israel, what doth the LoRd thy God require of thee, but to fear the LoRd thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LoRd thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LoRd, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 as ‘the first and great commandment’ (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). It is the basis for everything else. Therefore, Christ affirms and enshrines this first commandment, and with it, the rest of the law. Instead of destroying it, He honors it and carries it out in every way:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-19).

Turretin clarifies what Matthew 5:17 means: ‘not to destroy but to fulfill the law.’

Here *plerosai* does not mean to make the imperfect perfect or to correct the faulty which would rather be to destroy (*analysai*) it, but according to the Hebrew usage to do what is commanded. Thus Christ fulfilled the law not by addition or correction, but by observation and execution. He fulfilled the law in three ways: either as a doctrine by faithful preaching, solid confirmation and powerful vindication; or as a rule (*normam*) by a full and consistent keeping of it; or as a type by a perfect consummation, by exhibiting in himself the truth of the types and prophecies and the body of its shadows.¹⁰

Christ shows the true intent of the law

Christ definitely criticized current readings of the law by the Pharisees and showed that these so-called laws actually undercut the true intent of the law

of God. Thus He rebuked many elements of the ‘oral law’, which – it was claimed – went back to oral teachings of Moses (though never written down). Turretin explains:

Therefore the antithesis instituted by Christ is not between himself and Moses (or the law delivered by him), but the glosses of the Pharisees upon the law of Moses by which they restricted it too much and falsely interpreted it. He does this in order to show that the letter and the meaning of the law had been violated by them and not by him (although he was charged with it by his enemies).¹¹

We see Him doing so, for instance, in Matthew 5 (right after stating that He has come to fulfill the law). He states that ‘the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees’ keeps one out of heaven (cf. Matt. 5:20). He speaks against anger with the brethren (vv. 21-22) and requires reconciliation (vv. 23-26). He speaks not only against actual physical adultery, but also against a lustful spirit (vv. 27-28), and against divorce, except for adultery (vv. 31-32). He forbids swearing (vv. 33-37). In so doing, He is going against supposedly ‘righteous’ customs of the elders.

Prayer

It is the same in the verses that follow (vv. 38-42). These difficult verses (difficult to obey; not difficult to understand) exemplify the divine principle: love your enemies (vv. 43-44). It feels impossible until we deeply appropriate the truth that to love one’s enemies is to be like God (vv. 45-48). And this seems next to impossible, even to the regenerate, and so the next chapter (Matt. 6) sets before us the power of prayer to a prayer-hearing God. Here we are given the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13). And that is set in the context of the comforting truth that our heavenly Father already knows our needs, even before we ask Him (v. 6). Jesus specifically promises that what we have prayed for in secret will be openly rewarded by our heavenly Father (also v. 6).

Fasting

Another major discipline of the Christian life, that goes along very closely with prayer, is fasting. Andrew Murray suggested, somewhat graphically, that prayer is putting one hand on the mercy seat of God, and that fasting is letting go of the legitimate comforts of food and drink, so that we can put

that other hand also on the mercy seat.¹² It is a sort of double plea, and although God does not need it (or anything else, for that matter) to remind Him of our petition, He has appointed it as a way to draw us closer in fellowship to Himself, so that the praying and fasting (which in His wise counsel shall achieve their divinely ordained goal), will shape us into persons in closer contact with Christ, thereby becoming more like Him, as Romans 8:29 states: ‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son ...’

Prayer and fasting are ways of following Christ, and this means that:

We follow God, but do not test Him

Many of the beloved truths of the Twenty-third Psalm of David were, in a sense, set forth in the book of Exodus by Moses a good four and a half centuries before David’s life. Specifically, Moses draws attention to ‘the Angel of the Lord’, who seems clearly to be the Lord Himself, in Exodus 23. (We could say that He is the Mosaic precursor to David’s Good Shepherd). He leads us; we follow Him, but do not put Him to the test (as, for example, demanding that He shows us what lies ahead on our road). This somewhat mysterious Angel of the Lord is described with the highest possible attributes: ‘my name is in him’, and ‘I am in him’ (Exod. 23:20). Paul identifies this Angel as Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:9).

Immense blessings are promised to the people of God, insofar as they follow ‘the Angel of the Lord’. They are listed in Exodus 23:20-33:

Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites Thou shalt not bow down to their gods And ye shall serve the LoRd your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee ...

But a proper question is: how directly can these promises be applied to the Church of Christ? John Calvin fairly covered the points that need to be made here:

First, we hold that carnal prosperity and happiness did not constitute the goal set before the Jews to which they were to aspire. Rather, they were adopted into the hope of immortality; and assurance of this adoption was certified to them by oracles, by the law, and by the prophets. Secondly, the covenant by which they were bound to the Lord, was supported, not by their own merits, but solely by the mercy of the God, who called them. Thirdly, they had and knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises...¹³

Calvin goes on to emphasize that the promises of the Old Testament were particularly concerned with the future. 'When the apostle says that the promises of the gospel are contained in it [the Old Testament], he proves with utter clarity that the Old Testament was particularly concerned with the future life.'¹⁴ He would have us join with the heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11, particularly Abraham, 'For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God' (Heb. 11:10).

The scriptural testimony is realistic about the overall experience of Abraham; he triumphed, but not without passing through pains and difficulties of the most severe variety. Calvin comments:

In short, throughout life he was so tossed and troubled that if anyone wished to paint a picture of a calamitous life, he could find no model more appropriate than Abraham's! Let no man object that he was not completely unhappy, because he finally came safely through so many tempests. We will not say that he leads a happy life who struggles long and hard through infinite difficulties, but he who calmly enjoys present benefits without feeling unfortunate.¹⁵

Since according to the New Testament, we are sons and daughters of Abraham by faith (Rom. 4:1), then we certainly cannot expect everything to be smooth and easy on our own pathway of life. At very least, things must be allowed to happen so that patience will be developed in us, as Hebrews 10:36 says: 'For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.' No one develops patience without considerable pressure upon them, and in that regard, as Christians, we are no better than others. As Paul says: 'we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience [or possibly,

‘character’], and experience hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ (Rom. 5:3-5).

This is to say that as we seek to honour God’s character by walking in His Law, it may well involve us in various tribulations, for it sets us against the world system around us. But burdens and tribulations incident upon obeying the Lord, are not to be compared with the hope and love that the Holy Spirit abundantly sheds abroad in our hearts.

The Second Commandment

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:4-6; cf. Deut. 5:8-10).

This obviously forbids using idols or images in worship. Leviticus 19:4 says: ‘Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the LoRd your God’ (see also Leviticus 26:1, 2). ‘Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination to the LoRd, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen’ (Deut. 27:15).

This means that God alone determines the way we shall come into His presence. This is a matter of no small moment, for since God is the greatest reality of all, then nothing makes more sense than to worship Him. But how shall we worship such a God? As the Puritans often said, ‘God regulates His own worship.’ ‘Human inventions’ were considered ‘will-worship’ (that is, invented by the thoughts of man, whose mind, as Calvin used to say, is ‘an idol-factory’),¹⁶ and were therefore not accepted.¹⁷ In *Institutes* IV. X and XIX, Calvin discusses purity in worship, as he also does in his treatise, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, as well as in his *Reply to Sadoleto*.

Especially in *Institutes* IV. X, he weighs against the binding of people’s consciences by non-scriptural rules for worship and life (e.g. IV. X. 1-10). He argues that many of these rules, which ought to show Christ, actually

hide Him (IV. X. 14). ‘It is certain that all ceremonies are corrupt and harmful unless through them men are led to Christ. But those ceremonies in use under the papacy are separated from teaching so as to hold men to utterly meaningless signs.’¹⁸

Calvin openly admits that a number of issues are left open by the Lord as to the details of public worship:

But because he did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these.¹⁹

In section 31, for example, he allows freedom in secondary matters such as women’s head covering in church, and suggests the general principles of custom, humanity, and modesty. He adds: ‘Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will be our best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe.’²⁰

Christ is our worship-leader

Foundational to the vital practice of divine worship is the one Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Calvin works through what this means, especially in his *Commentary on Hebrews*. In comments upon Hebrews 8:2 (‘A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man’), he states that ‘Christ is the leader of our worship’ (our leitourgos). In His incarnation, atonement, and coronation, He has fulfilled and replaced the Old Testament priesthood, and ‘having obtained eternal redemption for us’ (Heb. 9:12), He has entered into the presence of God for us (Heb. 9:24), ‘For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified’ (Heb. 10:14). As Christ ‘through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God’ (Heb. 9:14), we need nothing either more or less to offer in our worship than our Mediator, who has cleared the way, and taken us through with Him.

Thus, in Calvin’s comments on Hebrews 6:19, he shows that as when in the Old Testament, the High Priest entered into the Holy Place, taking all

Israel with him, so in Christ's priestly work, 'in the person of one man,' all have entered into the sanctuary together in Him. Even as God the Father accepted Israel in the person of the High Priest bearing the sacrificial blood to the mercy seat, so He accepts all true worshippers, as His crucified, risen Son now represents them in the heavenly sanctuary. This is to say that our earthly worship as the church has validity because it is the counterpart of His heavenly worship. In worship, as in justification, sanctification, adoption and glorification, we are 'accepted in the beloved' (Eph. 2:6). This connection between the offering of the High Priest and the mercy seat is made absolutely explicit in the two occurrences of this word (*hilasterion*) in the New Testament. While the first speaks of the Holy of Holies and is translated *mercy seat*, its only other occurrence in Romans transfers this to the Person of Jesus, 'whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation (literally a Mercy Seat) through faith in his blood' (Rom 3:25).

Where Calvin is contrasting animal blood and the blood of Christ in his discussion of Hebrews 10:19, he states:

... but the blood of Christ, which is subject to no corruption, but flows ever as a pure stream, is sufficient for us even to the end of the world. It is no wonder that beasts slain in sacrifice had no power to quicken, as they were dead; but Christ who arose from the dead to bestow life on us, communicates his own life to us. It is a perpetual consecration of the way, because the blood of Christ is always in a manner distilling before the presence of the Father, in order to irrigate heaven and earth.

In the Old Testament, God appointed the right way of worship. The males of the nation were to go to the central shrine three times a year (Exod. 23:14). Daily there was to be the sacrifice of clean animals, with the priest laying his hands on their heads as he confessed the sins of the people, and also the Lord appointed 'the tent of meeting', whose detailed structure was revealed by God through Moses: 'And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it' (Exod. 25:8, 9).

Jesus made it clear that He was the true temple (John 2:19: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up', and Matthew 26:61: 'This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three

days'). Furthermore, He was precisely all that the tabernacle signified (John 1:14: 'And the Word became flesh and tabernacled (*eskanosen*) among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.')

All that the tabernacle signified by type and shadow, in its structure, and in the worship that was appointed to go on in it, is brought to culmination and full reality in Jesus Christ, the Logos who took on flesh and blood. Jesus Christ is the ultimate meeting place of God and man, where sins are put away, and loving communion is restored.²¹

John Owen perceptively described this connection:

When he was incarnate, and came into the world, it is said that *eskanose*, 'he fixed his tabernacle among us,' John 1:14 All that old curious structure, for a habitation of God, did only represent his taking our nature upon him, fixing his tent thereby among men He himself called his *own body* his temple, with respect unto the temple of Jerusalem, which was of the same nature and use with the tabernacle, John 2:19-22. And this he did, because his body was that true, substantial temple and tabernacle whereof he was the minister That, therefore, wherein God *dwells really and substantially*, and on the account whereof he is our God in the covenant of grace, that, and no other, is the true tabernacle. But this is in Christ alone, for 'in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,' Col. 2:9. Thus the human nature of Christ is that true, substantial tabernacle, wherein God dwelleth personally.²²

As tabernacle and temple were the way of worship ordained by God in the Old Testament, so Christ Himself fulfills and thus replaces them upon His incarnation. He is hence the way of worship since His appearing. It is significant to note that in the Tabernacle (and Temple which followed it), while there was in the inner sanctum the Ark with its mercy seat, and in the outer compartment a table for the shewbread and a candlestick, there was no chair. That is because the work of the High Priest was never finished; daily (in the outer courts) and yearly (in the holiest place of all), he had to be standing in order to continue his atoning work. But one of the first things we are told about Christ's ascension is that once He went back on high, He took His seat at the right hand of God: 'Who being the brightness of his

glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high ...' (Heb. 1:3).

The Epistle to the Hebrews works out how Christ fulfills and perfects the way all of His people are to come – in Him – to the Father. The Son Incarnate 'tasted death for every man' (Heb. 2:9), thereby, in His vicarious sufferings, making us 'one with him' in His sanctification of our human nature (Heb. 2:10-13). Thereby He defeated the devil, who delighted to use the power of death over sinners, and He even delivered His people from bondage to the 'fear of death' (v. 15). Having been tempted in all ways (yet without sin), 'he is able to succour them that are tempted' (v. 18).

Through faith, we 'enter into his rest' (Heb. 3:7-19; 4:1-11, commenting on Ps. 95). From that place of rest (in the finished work of Christ), we are enabled '[to] come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need' (Heb. 4:16). By 'two immutable things' (a divine oath and a divine promise – cf. Heb. 6:18), our anchor is secured 'within the veil' (6:20), for Jesus, our Saviour, who forever holds us safely within His hand, is seated there, and is interceding for us (Heb. 7:24-28).

In the new phase of the old, but now renewed Covenant of Grace, God will, He says, 'put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and [I] will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Jer. 31:33; cf. Heb. 8:10). Our law-giver is also our vicarious law-keeper, and all our hope for acceptance is in Him. We are reminded of this many times by day and by night, when we conclude our prayers with 'Through Jesus Christ our Lord', or 'In Jesus' name.'

The Third Commandment

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain (Exod. 20:7; cf. Deut. 5:11).

This immediately rules out all profane swearing, although to swear in the sense of taking a solemn oath is called for in a godly society (as in marriage vows, and entrance upon public office). It also precludes all blasphemy, as in the death penalty meted out in Leviticus 24:10-16. Given the transcendent holiness of God, everything about Him – not least, His Name

– shares in that transcendent purity. Hence, how we handle the holy Name is of highest significance for our lives.

The third commandment also rules out dishonest communications. Jesus taught that our communications are to be very simple: ‘Yea, yea, and ‘nay, nay’ (Matt. 5:37). Our lives are to be honest, and it is not necessary to back up our words with various oaths. The basis of it all is found, for instance, in Isaiah 45:23: ‘I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.’ God is our example, and our strength.

And the third commandment requires us to carry out our promises. Turretin says: ‘First, to keep faith is an act of truth, justice and fidelity. He that keeps faith does what he says, and to which he is bound, the characteristic of fidelity. He restores to another what is his due according to the promise, the characteristic of justice.’²³

This fidelity to one’s word must be carried out even when it is made to pagans. Turretin points out how God approved of this in the conduct of the Israelites to the Gibeonites:

We have sworn unto them by the LoRd God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them. This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them (Josh. 9:19, 20). And that no one might condemn testifies that he was pleased with it (Josh. 10:13). And when Saul (a hundred years afterwards) put to death certain of the Gibeonites, God testified how greatly he was displeased by sending a famine ...²⁴

Calvin makes three points concerning this third commandment:

First, whatever our mind conceives of God, whatever our tongue utters, should savor of his sacred name, and lastly serve to glorify his greatness. Secondly, we should not rashly or perversely abuse his Holy Word and worshipful mysteries Finally, they should ever be honored and prized among us. Finally, we should not defame or detract from his works ... but whatever we recognize as done by him we should speak of it with praise of his wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. That is what it means to hallow God’s name.²⁵

The Larger Catechism of The Westminster Assembly (1640s) listed what was forbidden by this commandment:

Q. 113. What are the sins forbidden in the third commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the third commandment are, the not using of God's name as is required, and the abuse of it in ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning or otherwise using his titles, attributes, ordinances, or works, by blasphemy, perjury; all sinful cursings, oaths, vows and lots; violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful; and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful; murmuring and quarreling at, curious prying into, and misapplying of God's decrees and providences; misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the word, or any part of it, to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain jangles, or the maintaining of false doctrines; abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms, or sinful lusts and practices; the maligning, scorning, reviling, or any wise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways; making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends; being ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by uncomformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.

We are told that in most Western countries the court dockets are jammed with lawsuits. If the third commandment were more widely and deeply observed within society, the number of suits would be massively lowered. If people's word was their bond, how different business, family and politics would quickly be! How many fewer divorces? And how much purer would be the daily conversation in our homes and streets!

R. T. Ingram shows the foundational nature of this commandment to all the structures of a healthy society:

The foundation for all legal procedure involving civil disputes is clearly in the third commandment. The oath of office, the trustworthiness of witnesses, the stability of a society in terms of a common regard for truth, the faithfulness of clergy to their ordination vows, of wives and husbands to their marital vows, and much more all hinge on the holiness of the oath or the vow. Where there is no regard for truth, when men subscribe to oaths and vows with no intention of abiding by their terms, then social anarchy and degeneration ensue.²⁶

Thus, keeping holy God's Name belongs to the honour He eternally deserves, and it is the safeguard of civil society as well.

The Fourth Commandment

Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exod. 20:8-11; cf. Deut. 5:12-15).

In the Genesis account of the creation week, we are told concerning the six days: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). But of the seventh day alone is it said: 'And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made' (Gen. 2:3). Calvin comments:

For *Kadesh* with the Hebrews, is to separate from the common number. God therefore sanctifies the seventh day, when he renders it illustrious, that by a special law it may be distinguished from the rest.... He had the same end in view in the appointment of his own *rest*, for he set apart a day selected out of the remainder for this special use. Wherefore that benediction is nothing else than a solemn consecration, by which God claims for himself the meditations and employments of men on the seventh day.²⁷

'Grammatical considerations indicate that two things are implied by the clause: "he hallowed it": on the one hand, He made it holy (the Piel stem of the verb here implies causation), and on the other hand, He declared it to be holy, or consecrated it (for this form of the verb also carries here a declarative sense, according to Leupold).²⁸ God's causing the day to be holy is directly connected to His abstaining from work...the actual Hebrew text reads, "and He abstained from work" (*wayyisboth*). Rather than conveying the idea of rest and refreshment, at this point – as Cassuto shows – 'It has a negative connotation: "not to do work."'²⁹

Calvin adds that the purpose of this day is ‘that they being released from all other business, might the more readily apply their minds to the Creator of the world For God cannot either more gently allure, or more effectually incite us to obedience, than by inviting and exhorting us to the imitation of himself.’³⁰

Cassuto argues that: ‘Every seventh day without intermission since the days of creation, serves as a memorial to the idea of the creation of the world by the word of God, and we must refrain from work thereon so that we may follow the Creator’s example and cleave to His ways. Scripture wishes to emphasize here that the sanctity of the Sabbath is older than Israel, and rests upon all mankind.’³¹ Some of the Puritans spoke of sabbath as being ‘one of the two sweet relics of Eden’ (the other being marriage).

Noah was observing the weekly sabbath even while in the ark, for – according to Genesis 8: 10 and 12, he sent the dove out of the ark ‘after yet other seven days.’ The fact that time was organized into a seven-day week is seen in Genesis, as for instance, when Laban told Jacob (when he had tricked him by substituting Leah for Rachel as his wife – Genesis 29:23): ‘Fulfill her week’ (Gen. 29:27). Genesis 50:10 indicates that the time of Jacob’s funeral lasted for a week. Even before Sinai, before precise Levitical instructions had been given, the Feast of the Passover was to last for seven days (Exod. 12:3-20). When the Lord began to rain down the manna on His people in the wilderness, it was done with the sabbath in mind; manna came down on six days, but on the sixth, enough was given to provide for the sabbath (Exod. 16:22-30).

The creational sabbath represented God’s resting from His work of six days in the old creation, and what we may term ‘the resurrectional sabbath’ is the first day of the new creation, when the risen Lord, having completed His atoning work, having presented it to the Father, has now come back to bless His people. In John, on the afternoon of resurrection day, the risen Christ suddenly showed up among His people, and gave them ‘Peace’ (John 20:21), and ‘breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost’ (John 20:23). It is no surprise that the exiled apostle John was ‘in the Spirit on the Lord’s day’ (Rev. 1:10).

A Change in the Day, but not in the Principle

The New Testament nowhere specifically states that the Sabbath was changed from the seventh day to the first, but the activities of the church

indicate that to have been the case. B. B. Warfield has explained this well:

A certain emphasis seems to be placed precisely upon the fact that it was on the first day of the week that he rose. This is true of all the accounts of his rising. Luke, for example, after telling us that Jesus rose ‘on the first day of the week,’ on coming to add the account of his appearing to the two disciples journeying to Emmaus, throws what almost seems to be superfluous stress on that also having happened ‘on that very day.’ It is in John’s account, however, that this emphasis is most noticeable. ‘Now, on the first day of the week,’ he tells us, ‘cometh Mary Magdalene early,’ to find the empty tomb. And then a little later: ‘When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week,’ Jesus showed himself to his assembled followers ... John proceeds equally sharply to define the time of his next showing himself to them as ‘after eight days’; that is to say it was on the next first day of the week that ‘his disciples were again within’ and Jesus manifested himself to them. The appearance is strong that our Lord, having crowded the day of his rising with manifestations, disappeared for a whole week to appear again only on the next Sabbath.³²

Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae*, notes that ‘the Saturday sabbath commemorating the first creation was changed into the Lord’s day commemorating the new creation begun in Christ’s resurrection ...’³³ That change was reflected in the weekly worship of the missionary churches, as observed in the movements of Saint Paul.

Paul’s regular practice on his missionary journeys took account of the normal assembly of believers on the first day of the week (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2 – in this case the gathering of a collection). Acts 20:7 indicates that it was the custom of believers ‘on the first day of the week, to gather together to break bread’, and he remained in Troas an entire week so that he might meet with the Christians on that day. As Johannes Weis comments: ‘The celebration of the Lord’s Day, the day of the Resurrection, is therefore already customary in the churches of Asia Minor.’³⁴

Does The Apostle Paul Abrogate Sabbath Observance?

Some have understood three passages written by the Apostle Paul to have relaxed the necessity of sabbath observance: (1) Romans 14:5, 6; (2) Galatians 4:9-11, and (3) Colossians 2:16, 17. We look at them in turn.

Romans 14:5, 6: One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

Robert L. Dabney has written helpfully on this matter in his ‘The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design, and Proper Observance.’³⁵ He puts these verses into their proper context in Romans 14, and notes that: (1) ‘...at the end of Romans 14, whether any man’s light is wholly correct or not, he must act conscientiously.’³⁶ (2) He observes that we are not to be censorious, but to respect the convictions of others,³⁷ and (3) ‘... when the apostle saw some professed Christians teaching that a man should make self-righteous merit by continuing to burden himself with the Jewish new-moons, sabbaths, fasts ... after the obligation of them in fact was repealed he confessed that this alarmed him (Gal. 4:11), and made him feel as though all his trouble in preaching salvation by free grace to them was to go for nothing.’³⁸ He adds: ‘Hence the apostle commands that these Jewish holy days, feasts and fasts are not to be enforced, because that new dispensation of which they were shadows or types had now come with its own divinely-appointed ordinances, and taken the place of others. He did not design to be understood as speaking at all of the Lord’s day.... He means only the Jewish holy days.’³⁹

Galatians 4:9-11: But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, let I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

F. F. Bruce believes, with other Pauline scholars, that ‘weak and beggarly elements’ (*stoicheia*) were, in sum, ‘principalities and powers’ or ‘elemental spirits of the world’.⁴⁰ It seems probable that these ‘elements’ were connected to the calendar now being observed by the Galatians.⁴¹ There is no suggestion that ‘the times’ they were observing included the age-old biblical sabbath.

Colossians 2:16, 17: Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

The ‘sabbath days’ referred to here, go along with ‘an holyday’ and ‘the new moon’. These were Jewish ‘shadows’ which were fulfilled in Christ (‘but the body is of Christ’). But I believe that B. B. Warfield draws a fair conclusion, namely, that the ancient, universal weekly sabbath is not included in, nor eclipsed by these now fulfilled shadows: ‘In thus emancipating his readers from the shadow-ordinances of the Old Dispensation, Paul has no intention whatever, however, of impairing for them the obligations of the moral law, summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments. It is simply unimaginable that he could have allowed that any precept of this fundamental proclamation of essential morality could pass into desuetude.’⁴²

Robert L. Dabney summarized well the biblical position:

The Jewish Sabbath was a sign, and also something else. Its witnessing use has passed away for Jews, so far as it was to them a sign of their exodus, their peculiar theocratic covenant and their title to the land of Canaan. But its other uses, as a means of grace and sign of heaven, remain for them and for all. Moreover, the Christian Sabbath, which is the Lord’s day, remains just as much a ‘sign’ of our Christian separation from the world and engagement to be the Lord’s as the seventh day ever was to the Jew It is as old as the race; it was given to all the race, the completion of creation. It is dictated by a universal necessity of man’s nature, which has not at all changed When the typical dispensation passed away, then this temporary use of the Sabbath fell off, and the original institution remains. God’s day is now to us just what it was to Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham.⁴³

Humanity’s Need of Sabbath Rest

Pope Benedict XVI (when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger) showed the profound need of the human personality for sabbath rest:

The number that governs the whole is seven; in the scheme of seven days it permeates the whole in a way that cannot be overlooked. This is the number of a phase of the moon, and thus we are told throughout this account that

the rhythm of our heavenly neighbor is also the rhythm of our human life It lets us know that the rhythm of the heavenly bodies is, more profoundly, a way of expressing the rhythm of the heart and the rhythm of God's love, which manifests itself there.⁴⁴

The late Rev. William Still of the Church of Scotland in Aberdeen wrote with insightful details on the practice in our modern world of observing the sabbath.⁴⁵ He demonstrates the physical and emotional value of six days' work and one day's rest to the human race (even apart from primary spiritual concerns). The French Revolution, in one of its more radical phases, forbade sabbath observance by making the work week longer. But the well-being of the population suffered to such a degree that the revolutionaries had to reinstate the sabbath. One of the physical and emotional problems of our post-industrial generation that has ignored the sabbath (at least since the 1960s) is that it now finds itself unable to rest. Years ago, a lead article in *Time* magazine (December 17, 1990) charted the widespread inability of many people to sleep and relax.⁴⁶

It would constitute an interesting study to compare the physical and emotional lives of people who regularly keep the sabbath holy, and those who do not, but try to make up what they lack in relaxation by taking long vacations once or twice a year. This would make for a fascinating Ph.D. dissertation.

Or consider Judith Shulevitz's article in the NY Times, March 2, 2003, entitled 'Bring Back the Sabbath' as a testimony from a nonbeliever of the importance of the Sabbath:

My mood would darken until by Saturday afternoon I'd be unresponsive and morose. My normal routine, which involved brunch with friends and swapping tales of misadventure in the relentless quest for romance and professional success, made me feel impossibly restless.

I started spending Saturdays by myself and after a while I got lonely and did something that as a teenager, profoundly put off by her religious education, I could never have imagined wanting to do. I began dropping in on a nearby synagogue. It was only much later that I developed a theory about my condition.

I was suffering from the lack of a Sabbath. There is ample evidence that our relationship to work is out of whack. Ours is a society that pegs status

to overachievement. We can't help admiring workaholics. Let me argue instead on behalf of an institution that has kept workaholism in reasonable check for thousands of years. Most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. You cannot downshift casually and easily. That is why the Puritan and Jewish Sabbaths were so exactly intentional. The rules did not exist to torture the faithful; they were meant to communicate the insight that interrupting the ceaseless round of striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as social sanction.

For those who are interesting in keeping sabbath, it would be well to consider the clear remarks made by *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*:

Q.60: How is the Sabbath to be sanctified? A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

Q. 61: What is forbidden in the fourth commandment? A. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission or careless performance of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

We have taken for granted, but not discussed, that this commandment requires us to work six days a week before the day of rest. Thus, the same God who requires rest, also requires work. Work was given to man as part of his purpose, as he represented the rest of the created order. God commanded Adam to dress and keep the Garden of Eden, where He had placed him (Gen. 2:15). Note that God's command to 'dress and keep' (*abad* and *shamar*) the garden refers not merely to the physical activities of tending of the garden but, more importantly based on its use throughout the Pentateuch, to the cultivation of the spiritual life before the LoRd. Also in the garden, he named the animals (Gen. 2:20). Noting that Adam had no one equal to himself with whom he could have fellowship in his kingdom

labors, the Lord took one of the ribs of Adam and formed it into a woman, to be his wife (Gen. 2:18-25).

After the Fall of Adam and Eve, work became more difficult (Gen. 3:17-19). Yet work itself was not a curse, only it became more difficult with the ground being infested by thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18). In a similar way, the Fall made child-bearing more difficult (cf. Gen. 3:16), but it was still God's good design, and was a major way of blessing. As far as work is concerned, we see aspects of what that work involved in Genesis 4, where Abel kept sheep, and Cain collected the fruit of the ground (4:2-4). Later we find Jabal raising cattle (4:20); Jubal playing the harp and organ (4:21), and Tubal-Cain, 'an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron' (4:22). In addition to Noah's building the Ark, Genesis 9:20 tells that 'Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard ...' Jacob was blessed in his labor: 'God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and new wine' (Gen. 27:28).

Abraham worked seriously at administration, to conduct the affairs of a large, moving encampment, including a private army of over three hundred (e.g. Gen. 12:5, etc.). He had, for instance, to handle strife between his herdsmen and those of Lot (Gen. 13). He had to do the work necessary to maintain the land which the Lord had given him (e.g. Gen. 17:8). If intercessory prayer can be considered work, then Abraham did his share of it, as when he interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:23-33). He bought some real estate from the pagans, for a burial place (Gen. 23).

Among other duties, Isaac farmed: 'Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him' (Gen. 26:12). He also dug (and then had to re-dig) wells of water, maliciously covered up by the Philistines (Gen. 26:18-25). When Isaac thought he was blessing Esau (although, guided by Rebekah his mother, Jacob pretended to be his older brother), Isaac gave an agricultural blessing, which would require much labor in years to come: 'Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine' (Gen. 27:28). Yet when Esau found out that he had been tricked out of his blessing, he begged his father for another blessing. It was similar to that given to Jacob: 'Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above ...' (Gen. 27:39). Both of these blessings entailed long years of faithful work.

At the behest of his mother, Jacob fled home and went to his relatives in Haran (Gen. 28–31). There, Jacob lived with his uncle Laban, and worked fourteen years for Laban to gain his two wives (Rachel and Leah). After Jacob and his family stole away, Laban soon caught up with them, and reproached Jacob. Jacob heatedly responded to his father-in-law: ‘This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times’ (Gen. 31:38-41). Very heavy work had been involved during all of these years.

We mentioned the work of intercession in the experience of Abraham. Jacob also took part in it many years later, when he interceded for his family before Esau and his small army came to them (Gen. 32:24-32), during which strange experience, Jacob actually wrestled with the mysterious captain of the host [of angels].

Young David first served as a shepherd of his father’s flocks around Bethlehem. Later he was chosen by Samuel to serve as king of Israel, to replace Saul. He served with distinction among Saul’s troops, and eventually was made king by the providence of the Lord. He had good help in his military activities, for Joab and Abner worked as captains of the troops under David. In addition to fighting and ruling, David labored by gathering up great treasures to be used in the Temple when it was built.

David’s son, King Solomon, among a plethora of other duties, oversaw the immense work of those who built the Temple in Jerusalem, including contracting with King Hiram for having the timber for it cut and trimmed.

We are told of the work of some of the prophets. Jeremiah in addition to the vocation of verbal prophecy, also wrote a book (Jer. 36:17; 51:60). The prophet Amos worked as a trimmer of sycamore trees and a shepherd (Amos 7:14). He speaks of those who built houses and planted pleasant vineyards (Amos 5:11. 9:14). The Assyrians would lose their labor by which they set up towers and built palaces (Isa. 23:13). The inhabitants of Jerusalem would lose their labor, in which they dug a ditch to carry water between the two walls (Isa. 22:11). Their labor was well-intended and much called for, but it was for naught, for they refused to look to God (Isa. 22:11).

After the deportation of Israel into Babylon, Daniel and his three colleagues worked by studying the wisdom of Babylon, and then by serving in its bureaucracy (Dan. 1:4, 17; 2:49; 5:10-12, 6:3, etc.).

Work is also required in the New Testament. Jesus indicates that the basis of all godly work is to believe in Him: 'They said unto him, what shall we do that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent' (John 6:28, 29). In John 9:4, he said: 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.' In His high priestly prayer, Jesus could say to His Father, 'I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do' (John 17:4).

The Holy Spirit spoke of the work to which He had called Barnabas and Saul (later Paul): 'As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them' (Acts 13:2). This divine call to the ministry did not mean, however, that Paul never did any more secular work. He continued his tent-making from time to time, especially in order to avoid calling on the churches for money. He instructed the church to 'honour widows' (1 Tim. 5:3), and this would have included financial support when needed. But he makes it clear that their families should support them, where possible. He specifies that widows should not be supported until they are past sixty years old (1 Tim. 5:9) and are of good character (1 Tim. 5:9,10). The younger ones should remarry (1 Tim. 5:14).

Paul teaches that workers should sincerely serve their employers, out of fear of God (Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:7). John Murray writes: 'The economic structure presupposed in the teaching of the New Testament as well as of the Old is one in terms of the distinction between rich and poor. And it is apparent that this distinction is recognized not simply as a providential fact which the application of biblical principles would in due time eliminate, but as a distinction compatible with the divinely instituted order of society.'⁴⁷

The believers of the New Testament would certainly have followed the injunction of Ecclesiastes 9:10: 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.' Paul taught in Romans 12:11: 'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.' He enjoined God's people: 'whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God' (1 Cor. 10:31). The point of the parable of Christ concerning the talents is to be diligent,

even if it means investing the money (Matt. 25:15). And the general principle among the godly has been a fair day's work for a fair day's wages, for all is done in the presence of God, as we see in Ephesians 6:5: 'Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ.' The words of Jesus weigh heavily here: 'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much' (Luke 16:10).

Work was stressed among the Calvinists, resulting in what has been called 'the Puritan work ethic'. Max Weber famously wrote on this as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,⁴⁸ but some of his assertions about Calvinism are open to serious critique, although his general point is well-taken. R. H. Tawney noted that Calvin's acceptance of commerce and trade in the sixteenth century was of great import for the future of Western society.⁴⁹ He stated: 'It means that Calvinism and its offshoots took their stand on the side of the societies which were to be most characteristic of the future, and insisted that it was not by renouncing them, but by untiring concentration on the task of using for the glory of God the opportunities which they offered, that the Christian life could and must be lived.'⁵⁰ Tawney correctly noted that Calvin recognized 'the necessity of capital, credit, and banking, large-scale commerce and finance, and the other practical facts of business life.'⁵¹

All in all, work has helped to make prosperous societies where practiced. Among those societies, at least in the past, both work and sabbath have been widely followed. In the history of the Anglo-Saxon world, sabbath was very important even through the early twentieth century. Christopher Hill argues in his *Puritanism and Revolution* that one reason so many farmers and business owners in seventeenth-century England gravitated to the Puritans was because their emphasis on sabbath observance after six days of work cut out nearly one hundred and fifty wasteful saints' days on which people did not work.⁵² Now the country was more productive, and even apart from spiritual reasons, this counted for a great deal in drawing people into the general Puritan voting bloc.

As Karl Barth rightly stated, Martin Luther had already changed the paradigm here, concerning the broadening of a truly Christian vocation from the monastery to faithful work done for the Lord in the secular world.

This is the case even in I Cor. 7:20: *‘ekastos en ta klessei*, ‘a *‘eklathe*, *‘en taute meneto*, [let every man abide in the same calling to wherein he was called.] To be sure, Luther here translated *klesis* ‘vocation’ (*Beruf*), and took it to mean that each must keep to the divinely allotted sphere of work, recognizing in it his vocation, and being obedient to God in it, with no thoughts of becoming a monk the better to serve God in a Christian activity outside the secular sphere. This is how the word *Beruf* is understood in the *Augsburg Confession* (Art. 16 and 17), and it is in that sense that, with a religious pathos corresponding to its origin, it has passed over into modern thinking and usage.⁵³

Confirming that anyone, in whatever vocation, should be happy to remain there to serve God, Luther (translated by Barth) wrote:

Whoever is a Magistrate, Father of the Family, Servant, Teacher, student, let him remain in his calling, and carry out his office honorably and faithfully, with no worry about those things which are outside his calling. Doing this, he has glory in himself, so that he will be able to say, I have done the best I could in faithfulness and diligence to the divine calling given me, and therefore I know that this work done in faith and obedience to God pleases God So that it is clear that whoever knows his work, insofar as he has done it with a pious life, it is the divine work; because it is the work of divine calling, based on the mandate of God.⁵⁴

Work then is, as we have already noted, not a curse, but intended as a blessing of God for the human race. Yet the work itself needs to be meaningful in order to satisfy the soul engaged in it. At times, some political prisoners have been subjected to purposeless types of work in order to make their imprisonment even worse. In his *House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky tells about a scene in a concentration camp, where the prisoners had to fill an empty vat of water at the end of a path, then they had to take the same water and pour it into a vat at the other end; it was meaningless. But prisoners who had to work outside, cutting trees for bridges and roads, tended to survive much longer, for what they did had purpose, which they could see, even though their labours were physically harder outside the camp. The nature of work has a great deal to do with its effects on those who do it.

The promise of God through Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, assures those who work as to the Lord: ‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord’ (v. 58). For God sovereignly makes all things to work together for good to them that love the Lord (Rom. 8:28). From early childhood to old age, believers are mercifully surrounded with many tasks and responsibilities, varying with their stage in life and with their capacities. Their life is anything but boring! In their often-challenging lives, the godly have followed, as best they could (with many interruptions!), what Jesus said about Himself and the Father: ‘... my Father worketh hitherto, and I work’ (John 5:17).

An old Southern (USA) gospel hymn captured the truth here effectively:

Work, for the night is coming,
Work thro’ the sunny noon;
Fill brightest hours with labor,
Rest comes sure and soon.
Give every passing minute,
Something to keep in store,
Work for the night is coming,
When man works no more.⁵⁵

1. Calvin, *Institutes*, II. VII. 6-9.

2. *Ibid.*, II. VII. 10-11.

3. *Ibid.*, II. VII. 12-13.

4. Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Mentor, Geanies House: Fearn, 2010).

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 303, 304.

6. *Ibid.*, II. IX. 4.

7. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae IaIIae*, 103.3 (A Concise Translation by Timothy McDermott (Christian Classics: Allen, Texas, 1989), p. 295.

8. For these distinctions in types of law, see Philip Ross, *op. cit.*

9. Thomas Aquinas, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

10. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, volume Two (P & R Publishing: Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1994), p. 20.
11. Ibid., p. 21.
12. See Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*.
13. Calvin, op. cit., II. x, p. 2.
14. Ibid., II. x, p. 3.
15. Ibid., II. x, p. 11.
16. E.g., see Calvin. op. cit., I. XI. 8 – ‘Man’s mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God Therefore the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth ...’
17. James I. Packer has a fine discussion of the developments of the Puritans beyond Calvin in *A Quest For Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Crossway Books: Wheaton Ill., 1990), chapter 15.
18. Ibid., IV. X. 14.
19. Ibid., IV. X. 30.
20. Ibid.
21. Douglas Kelly, op. cit., p. 154.
22. John Owen, *Hebrews* Vol. 6, p. 19.
23. Turretin, op. cit., p. 70.
24. Ibid., p. 68.
25. Calvin, op. cit., II. viii, p. 22.
26. Robert T. Ingram, *The World Under God’s Law*, p. 46.
27. John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, p.105.
28. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, p. 103.
29. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part I, From Adam to Noah, Genesis I–VI.8*, p. 63. This paragraph is taken from Douglas Kelly, *Creation and Change*, p. 330.
30. Calvin, op. cit., p. 106.
31. Cassuto, op. cit., p. 64.
32. B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 319, 320.
33. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae IaIIae*, 103.3 (A Concise Translation by Timothy McDermott (Christian Classics: Allen, Texas, 1989), p. 302.
34. Quoted in ibid., p. 321.
35. See R. L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* vol. 1, pp. 496-550.
36. Ibid., p. 526.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 527.
40. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: The New Testament Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982), p. 203.
41. Ibid., p. 204.
42. B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. I, p. 321.
43. Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol. I, p. 529.

44. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *'In the Beginning ...': A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995), pp. 26, 27.
45. William Still, *Rhythms of Rest and Work* (Didasko Press: Aberdeen, 1985).
46. 'Too much to do, too little rest.' It offered some suggestions on how to rest, but never mentioned the sabbath.
47. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 91.
48. Max Weber, *Die Prot. Ethik und die Geist des Kapitalismus*.
49. R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Penguin Edition: London).
50. Ibid., p. 92.
51. Ibid.
52. Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (Schocken Books: New York, 1958).
53. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, pp. 600, 601.
54. Taken from Karl Barth, op. cit., p. 644. Original Latin: Ut, qui Magistratus, Pater familias, Servus, Praeceptor, discipulus, etc., est, maneat in vocatione sua ac in ea probe et fideliter officium suum faciat, nihil sollicitus de his, quae extra vocationem suam sunt. Hoc faciens habet gloriam in seipso, ut dicere possit, Summa qua potui fide et diligentia feci opus vocationis divinitus mihi mandatum, ideoque scio hoc opus in fide et obedientia Dei factum placere Deo ... Ut scilicet unusquisque sciat opus suum, in quocunque tandem pio vitae genere sit, esse divinum opus: quia est opus vocationis divinae, habens mandatum Dei (*Comm. on Gal. 6:4. W. A., 40, II, pp. 152, 30f. and 153. 27f.*)'
55. By Annie L. Walker.

CHAPTER 14

COMMANDMENTS REGARDING OUR DUTY TO HUMANKIND

The last six commandments teach us our duty to humankind. God's word teaches us that we cannot love God properly without loving our fellow man. He specifically explains what this means in what it called 'The Second Table of the Law': 5–10.

The Fifth Commandment

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Exod. 20:12); Honour thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Deut. 5:16).

In order to grasp and apply this (and the other commandments), we will do well to take into account some of the hermeneutical guides offered in *The Westminster Larger Catechism* (in particular, Question 99):

Q. 99. What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?

'A. For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed: ...

'4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded; so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included

'6. That under one sin nor duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto ...'

There was a certain foreshadowing of these principles of interpretation in, for instance, Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Of the fifth commandment (which he counts the fourth): ‘... were added commands to honour the aged, to respect superiors, and show kindness to equals and inferiors.’¹

A major aspect of this commandment is respect for authority, and this includes respect for age. We see this in Leviticus 19:32: ‘Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LoRd.’ Proverbs 16:31 says that ‘The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.’ Saint Paul spoke of himself as Paul the aged (Phil. 9). He required: ‘That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things’ (Titus 2:2, 3).

The Promise of Long Life

Paul comments in Ephesians 6:2 that ‘this is the first commandment with promise.’ He then specifies the promise: ‘That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long upon the earth’ (v. 3). Deuteronomy 4:40 is similar: ‘Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LoRd thy God giveth thee, for ever.’

It is unwise, however, to take this promise of long life simplistically, for other matters need to be considered. Charles Hodge looks carefully at what is involved here:

The promise has a theocratical form in the Old Testament. That is, it has specific reference to prosperity and length of days in the land which God had given to his people as their inheritance. The apostle generalizes it by leaving out the concluding words and makes it a promise not confined to one land or people, but to obedient children everywhere. If it is asked whether obedient children are in fact thus distinguished by long life and prosperity? The answer is, that this, like all other such promises, is a revelation of a general purpose of God, and makes known what will be the usual course of providence. That some obedient children are unfortunate and short lived, is no more inconsistent with this promise, than that some

diligent men are poor, is inconsistent with the declaration, ‘The hand of the diligent maketh rich.’ Diligence, as a general rule, does secure riches, and obedient children, as a general rule, are prosperous and happy. The general promise is fulfilled to individuals, just so far ‘as is shall serve for God’s glory, and their own good.’²

This seeming paradox of the obedient and the diligent suffering hardship, poverty and persecution was presented to us in the life of Israel, if we follow the Patriarchs (Abraham, Job, etc.) into the Prophets (Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, etc.). And from there look to the disciples following the example of Jesus and see that the lives of believers in this fallen world most display the grace of God (*touto gar charis*) when they ‘endure grief, suffering wrongfully’ (1 Pet. 2:19). Somehow this injustice of outcome, when it is borne patiently by believers, has the unique ability to reveal the hidden realities of the Gospel to a watching world in a way which our visible and outward flourishing do not.

Respect for Civil and Church Authorities is included in ‘Parents’

Calvin was in line with the ancient Christian tradition when he stated that the fifth commandment ‘comprised by *synecdoche* all superiors, in authority’.³ Commenting on Psalm 82:6 – ‘I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High’, quoted by Jesus in John 10:34, Calvin notes: ‘It is a signal exaltation of magistrates, that God should not only count them in the place of parents, but present them to us dignified by his own name; whence also it clearly appears that they are to be obeyed not only from fear of punishment, “but also for conscience sake” (Rom. 13:5), and to be reverently honoured, lest God should be despised in them.’⁴

Some centuries earlier, Thomas Aquinas held this position, and discussed the situation when Christians are under disbelievers. ‘Since the law of grace does not abrogate human law based on reason, being believers does not as such exempt us from the already established authority of disbelievers ...’⁵

Although given to a theocracy, Deuteronomy 16:18-20 certainly provides a principle for other states in other contexts:

Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LoRd thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people

with just judgment. Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the LoRd thy God giveth thee.

Parents and Children

Before we go to the wider civil implications of this commandment, we must first consider the duties of parents and children. The first training ground for church and state is the home. Children during their childhood are to learn to obey their parents. To submit to the parents trains them to submit to God and to legitimate authority in the society around them. To do so is not generally easy, for it requires one to learn to go against the selfishness that marks us from our birth. Obviously, some children are more strong-willed than others, but all can be trained to do right eventually.

Children

It is important for a child to learn to submit to legitimate parental authority very early, for when they are small, they are not yet emotionally and intellectually equipped to make right decisions for themselves without outside help. That is one of the great values of parents and guardians. There is of course a strong difference between authority and authoritarianism. Legitimate authority is reasonable and fair. Avoid like the plague authoritarianism, for it will grieve the spirit of the child, and make him or her want to go in another direction. Authoritarianism requires submission on the grounds that one is more powerful, without taking into consideration the good of the follower, and without having the patience to explain the requirements.

Many years ago, I was holding a conference in a good church in a certain part of the South. I could not help but notice that the pastor was dealing very harshly with his son. It took a while for me to get up my nerve to address the matter, but finally I said: 'I have several children, and certainly make my share of mistakes. But I do seek to apologize when I have done wrong. Otherwise they will not follow me in the faith.' I do not know what that minister made of these brief words spoken from experience.

Parents

Often it is wise for a parent to say to the child: 'We are both servants of God; I am not better than you, but he has put me in the position to guide you in these matters; later you will be able to do it on your own, and I will be glad for that day!'

One of the great lessons is 'more caught than taught', and that is courtesy. Even when it is unpleasant, parents are still to deal in a courteous manner to their children, and the children will pick up this attitude. 1 Peter 3:8 says: '*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous ...*'

But there is also a place for verbal instruction (although parents must be very careful to follow themselves what they are requiring of their children). They are to be taught not to interrupt when someone else is speaking, but to pay attention. In general, they should be taught to stand when an adult enters the room, and to offer their chair, if needed. They are to be taught to look the person to whom they are speaking in the face, and not to be looking at a cellphone!

The parents are to spend time with the child: not only teaching them about the world, and perhaps some stories about the family history. (When my own children were little, and wanted to stay awake longer, I would ask them if they wanted to hear a story from the family history, and they gladly did so to postpone the inevitable!) Parents are to spend time playing with them, taking them to interesting places, taking them fishing and hunting, as well as playing ball and tag, etc. When possible, let them set some of the agenda; that will please them!

See to it that they are getting the best education you can provide. Study carefully the schools around you, and carefully consider whether you wish them to attend, or whether you could put them in a Christian school, or possibly spend some years teaching them at home. Much prayer and careful thought are called for here. Wherever they go, talk to them from time to time about what it is like at school, and listen with care. Always show them how interested you are in what is happening in their lives, but do not be 'a helicopter parent'; do not smother them. It is best to let them make some mistakes rather than to overwhelm them with what you think they should always be doing. Do not be harsh over human mistakes, for they know that you make them too. See to it that voices are not raised in the house.

Set a good example in what you say about others, as Titus 3:2 instructs: 'Speak evil of no man.' James 4:11 says: 'Speak not evil one of another,

brethren.’ And 2 Corinthians 12:20 says in the same manner: ‘Let there be no strifes, backbitings, whisperings.’

Above all else, have some kind of daily family prayer. As they get older, let them ask questions, and also lead in prayer, if they are willing (do not force them). Especially let them see their parents living by God’s grace; let them hear you apologize for your own sins and ask for forgiveness. (When you have offended them, it is entirely appropriate, and a wonderful pattern, to ask them for forgiveness.) Tell them what the death and resurrection of Christ mean to you. Tell them that they belong to Him first, and that you are only a temporary steward of their well-being. Let them know that you are not yet where you want to be, but that hand-in-hand you are on this pilgrimage together. As a pilgrim on journey to a holy place, be very moderate in your own habits, and they will more readily receive your warnings not to abuse alcohol or drugs.

The excellent wife of Jonathan Edwards, Mrs Sarah Edwards, was a holy model in how she (and her husband) raised their many children (eleven). These children became outstanding leaders in their own generation, as did their own children. Edwards’ *Memoirs* gives this report of her:

She had need to speak but once and she was cheerfully obeyed; murmuring and answering again were not known among her children. In their manners they were uncommonly respectful to their parents. When their parents came into the room, they all instinctively rose from their seats, and never resumed them until their parents were seated. And when either parent was speaking, no matter with whom they had been conversing, they were all immediately silent and attentive.⁶

Duties of Children and Parents

Parents are to encourage their children to marry when they reach the right age. Question and Answer 139 forbids parents from ‘undue delay of marriage’. Once they are married, the parents are to show respect to them by not interfering, and by encouraging them as much as possible.

Once grown, adult children are still to be careful to honour their parents. Generally, Christian commentators have pointed out two ways to do this: first, by showing respect and affection; to visit them regularly when one can, and by always being courteous to them. Secondly, they should be willing to provide for their parents’ need in old age, if that is necessary. In

most nations of the West, the elderly are usually at least partly looked after financially by the state along with their own savings, but even there, some old people may still need monetary or care assistance from their children. Jesus had harsh words for those who neglected their parents with the excuse that they were giving money to the Temple (as in the pretext of the custom of *corban* – Mark 7:11).

Hating Parents

Turretin explains what Christ means here: ‘When Christ commands us to hate parents for his sake (Luke 14:26), he does not wish the binding duties of piety to be denied them, which are founded in nature, and are indispensable. The command must be understood comparatively, so that the love of parents should yield to divine love (as when the commands of parents are opposed to the obedience due to God, we should postpone them to the commands of God).’⁷

One of the most powerful blessings both parents and children can impart to each other is for themselves to be submitted to God. This requires strict honesty with self and with others and excludes a prideful pretending to be finer than we are. This is kept up only by a life of prayer, and of being in the Word. An old hymn prays:

More holiness give me,
More striving within;
More patience in suffering,
More sorrow for sin;
More faith in my Saviour,
More sense of his care;
More joy in his service,
More purpose in prayer.⁸

The Sixth Commandment

Thou shalt not kill (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).

John Calvin has shown both the negative and positive nature of this commandment:

Besides, another principle is also to be remembered, that in negative precepts, as they are called, the opposite affirmation is also to be

understood; else it would not be by any means consistent, that a person would satisfy God's Law by merely abstaining from doing injury to others. Suppose, for example, that one of a cowardly disposition, and not daring to assail even a child, should not move a finger to injure his neighbors, would he therefore have discharged the duties of humanity as regards the Sixth Commandment? Nay, natural common sense demands more than that we should abstain from wrongdoing. And not to say more on this point, it will plainly appear from the summary of the Second Table, that God not only forbids us to be murderers, but also prescribes that every one should study faithfully to defend the life of his neighbor, and practically to declare that it is dear to him; for in that summary no mere negative phrase is used, but the words expressly set forth that our neighbors are to be loved. It is unquestionable, then, that of those whom God commands there to be loved, He here commends the lives to our care. There are, consequently, two parts in the commandment, – first, that we should not vex, or oppress, or be at enmity with any; and secondly, that we should not only live at peace with men, without exciting quarrels, but also should aid, as far as we can, the miserable who are unjustly oppressed, and should endeavour to resist the wicked, lest they should injure men as they list.⁹

In a certain sense, one could translate this commandment as: 'Thou shalt not murder.' The Old Testament elsewhere institutes capital punishment for certain crimes: especially that of murder. The famous *lex talionis* enshrine this principle: 'Thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe' (Exod. 21:23-25). This means that the punishment must fit the crime: a basic principle in all good law codes. Leviticus 24:17-21 restates it with certain additions:

And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast. And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death.

Deuteronomy 19:21 also says: ‘And thou shalt not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.’

The Old Testament included far more capital crimes than for murder, such as mistreatment of parents and man-stealing (cf. Exod. 21:12ff.). It included as a capital crime adultery, incest, crimes against nature, idolatry, heathen divination, and witchcraft (cf. Lev. 20 and Deut. 13). It also included offences against the Israelite theocracy, such as refusal to circumcise (Gen. 17:14), violation of the Passover (Exod. 12:15, 19), Sabbath breaking (Exod. 31:14), pollution of sacrifices (Lev. 7:20ff.), and sacrifices at places other than the appointed sanctuary (Lev. 17:7-9). These crimes, as we already noted, were peculiar to the Hebrew theocracy, and we do not find them enforced in the New Testament. It is important to note that capital punishment could not be carried out on the testimony of less than two witnesses (cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6, 19:15).

Christ’s interpretation of this topic in the Sermon on the Mount gets to the heart of the command so as to show that murder is not merely an external act. Rather it begins in our thought life, in our intentions, and only afterward is realized in action. What Jesus pinpoints for us in regard to this command is anger (Matt. 5:21,22). This is the seed. When anger and rage are implanted within a human person, and they grow unchecked and unopposed, the fruit will be hatred, division and finally, murder. We see this in the opening chapter of Genesis. When Cain becomes ‘very wroth’ (*mehode hara*), refusing to hear the warnings of God, he finally rises up against his brother and slays him (Gen 4:5-8). This may be why Christ in the Sermon on the Mount moves from the sixth commandment to an even lengthier call for reconciliation among brothers (Matt. 5:23-25).

Abortion

In addition to the sixth commandment, Exodus 21:22-25 precludes willful abortion: ‘If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman’s husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine ... And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life’

Cassuto explains:

When men strive together and they hurt unintentionally a woman with child, who had come near or between them for the purpose of making peace, so that her children come out (into the world), and no injury was done either to the woman or the child that was born, a pecuniary compensation was to be paid, such as the husband of the woman laid upon him, and he was to give it ... by (an appeal to) arbitrators. A fine is imposed, because even if no injury had been done to the woman and the fruit of her womb, such a blow might have endangered life....The plural... is employed for the purpose of speaking indefinitely, because there might possibly be more than one child in the womb. *‘But if injury occur (to the mother or the child), thou shalt give soul for soul, eye for eye ... wound for wound: thus perfect retribution was to be made.’*¹⁰

The number of willful abortions in the Western world is in the tens of millions. The United States of America’s Supreme Court ‘legalized’ abortion in January of 1973 in its ‘Roe vs. Wade’ Decision. Since then, far more babies have been slaughtered than have perished in all wars the USA has fought in from ‘the French and Indian War’ to the present. Unborn babies are in the direct image of God, and to kill them is to strike out against God Himself.

Karl Barth rightly said: ‘The unborn child is from the very first a child. It is still developing and has no independent life. But it is a man and not a thing, nor a mere part of the mother’s body....He who destroys germinating life kills a man The fact that a definite No must be the presupposition of all further discussion cannot be contested, least of all today.’¹¹

Apart from its blatant immorality, abortion of such a large percentage of our society has made it difficult to find native workers, and far worse – it has seriously lowered general respect for human life. In terms of the providence of a holy God, it is to be expected that the USA, and other offending nations, will be visited with severe judgments in years ahead. The coronavirus may be only the beginning.

War in the Old Testament

Armed conflict to obtain certain ends is found early in the Old Testament and is often approved of. For instance, we find Abraham (Abram at that time) fighting with several kings in the vale of Siddim, ‘which is the salt sea’ (Gen. 14). Some of these kings had attacked the king of Sodom, where

Abram's nephew Lot was living. He had captured Lot. Abram took a private army and defeated these kings and recovered Lot and his goods and people (cf. Gen. 14:16). The Lord approved of this military action (cf. see Gen. 14:18-20), through the blessings of the mysterious priest/king Melchizedek.

The seventh and twentieth chapters of Deuteronomy show God approving of war for his people. There is much of this divinely approved military action in the books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel. Of all the church fathers, Augustine offered the most reflection on war. He taught that just retribution restrained sinners and was in their own true interest.¹² He believed that at times war was necessary to restore peace.¹³ Christ's words, 'resist not evil' (Matt. 5: 39), did not prohibit wars, for evil intent rather than military action was the true danger. Love towards enemies did not prevent a 'benevolent severity' towards them.¹⁴

Augustine made a distinction between intention and act, by which he thought that war could be justifiable if it were motivated by charity. War was justifiable when a people or a city neglected either to punish wrongs done by its members or to restore what it had wrongly seized.¹⁵ He also held that a war waged on divine command was a just war (with especial reference to Numbers 21 and Joshua 8).¹⁶ He taught that war could be waged only by legitimate authority, not by private initiative.¹⁷

Capital Punishment in the New Testament

The New Testament is like the Old Testament, in that the taking of life is permitted under certain circumstances. The magistrate is armed with the power of the sword to avenge serious crimes, as we see in Romans 13:4 and 1 Peter 2:14. These verses indicate that when Christ says 'to resist not evil' (Matt. 5:39, 40), it is directed to the individual member of Christ, and not to the state, which has the responsibility to protect the public welfare. The same can be said of Paul's words in Romans 12:17, 'recompense no man evil for evil.'

Adultery. Yet Christ did not call for the death of the woman taken in adultery, but forgave her (cf. John 8), nor for that of the Samaritan woman, whom He met at the well, who had committed multiple sexual sins. Rather, He offered her the water of pardon and the life of God (cf. John 4).

Homosexual activity. Although homosexual activity was a capital offence in the Old Testament, we find in Paul's description of the church at Corinth that pardoned homosexuals were among the membership (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Their own blood did not have to be shed for their sins, but the blood of Christ, received by faith, availed for their eternal forgiveness.

War

The state also has the power to wage a just war. John the Baptist allowed military activity, when he answered the Roman soldiers who came to him for baptism, as to what they should then do. 'And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages' (Luke 3:14). He did not tell them to get out of the army. Turretin adds: '... the faith of the centurion is mentioned by Luke (Acts 10:1) and is adorned by the testimony of an angel. Nor does Paul refuse to employ a military guard for his safety and protection (Acts 23:17-31).'

¹⁸

Specifically, Turretin shows why states may under certain conditions wage war:

Now if small robberies are rightly punished (committed against a few), how much more severely should great and public robberies be punished of those who endeavour to lay waste a state and to devastate regions? He [the magistrate] is bound to undertake the defence of his subjects and to have a care for the public tranquility and safety; to guard the laws against the contumacious and open enemies who strive to destroy them (which cannot be done without just war).

¹⁹

As we think of war in our twenty-first century, the matter is very complex, with the inter-locking of multinational firms in a truly global economy. Powerful financial interests are probably able to push various states to military action to protect, or further, their own share of the market. It is not clear that the nation-state is always motivated by impartial interests, nor that it always stands on moral high grounds, although it will claim to do so in order to get the support of its citizenry for their military adventures. This does not mean that there are never just wars, but it is unclear how many military actions led by powerful states really are for truly defensive, if not benevolent purposes. People do have some right to be skeptical. When we pray, as Jesus taught us: 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done ...' and

‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ...’ we will be making a difference in small as well as in great matters far beyond us.

The Seventh Commandment

Thou shalt not commit adultery (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18)

This commandment honors and protects the divinely given institution of marriage between a man and a woman, originally instituted in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:18-25), where God saw that it was not good for the male to be alone, so He took a rib out of his side, and formed it into a female, who would be the right companion for him. They would reproduce children, who would carry on the image of God in the human race. In a marriage where they have been unable to bear children, the marriage is as equally valid as those who have offspring. And it needs to be added here, that some are called to marriage, while others are not (cf. Matt. 19:12). That means that both unmarried Christians are spiritual, and also that married Christians are spiritual.

Jonathan Grant has addressed the contribution that can be made to the Kingdom of God by those who remain single. ‘The broader network of friendships and relationships available to single people expresses this divine need for relationship within the enlarging household of God. It reflects God’s desire to invite and adopt all who respond ... singleness enables us to form a much broader network of friendships, both within the church and outside it ... they are also freer to be God’s scattered seed in the world.’²⁰

The man was already working before God gave him his wife: he was taking care of the Garden and had named the animals. We remember that in his care of the garden and ordering of animal life, he was carrying into action the divine blessing of Genesis 1:28 with his wife (his ‘ezer’) helping him to extend the Kingdom of God. So the wife would help him in these functions, as well as through procreation beginning the long line of covenantal family life. The life of the human family is patterned on the triune life of God. Ephesians 3:14, 15 says: ‘For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.’ Family therefore reflects in its own way the holy relationships within the blessed Trinity.

We note that there is a certain submission among equals within marriage, as the Father is head of the Trinity of three fully co-equal persons. Husband

and wife are equal in that both are created fully in the image of God; yet at the same time, the husband is given the role of headship within the marriage union (which, of course, he seeks to evade in the original temptation, Gen 3:6b).

Ephesians 5:21-33 describes the context of this headship and submission:

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church; For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined unto his wife and they shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Within this sacred covenant of marriage, the wife is to submit, and the husband is to love. The submission is within the loving context of marital union, and thus is 'in the Lord'. The submission is not absolute for absolute submission is owed only to God Himself. The love owed by the husband is on the model of how Christ 'loved us and gave himself for us'. In some cases, it may involve self-giving to the point of death, as it did with our Saviour.

A remarkable fact is given us in 1 Corinthians 11, where the woman is instructed to wear some kind of head-covering, as a sign that she is under the authority of the man, who was created first. In verse 7, we are told that the man is not to wear a head-covering, for he 'is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.' Among other things, this appears to imply that man's glory is seen in his wife. Thus, to assess the

man correctly, one needs to look at his wife: her spiritual standing will show how the man is doing in his relationship to God.

It is often (though not always) the case that family trouble is related to the man not thoroughly loving his wife, and/or the wife not fully submitting to her husband. God's appointed way is best, and usually issues in peace and amity. Both proper submission (on the part of the wife – cf. 1 Peter 3:5-6) and due consideration (by the husband of the woman's needs – cf. 1 Peter 3:7) are the background for joint prayer in a solid marriage, as Peter shows us: 'Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour to the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered' (1 Pet. 3:7).

Genesis 2:25: 'And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.' Some of the Eastern Church writers, such as Symeon the New Theologian, reasonably suggested that the shame only came after the Fall, for before that, the man and woman were covered with the glory of God.²¹ That glory was lost in the Fall.

Nonetheless, the institution and sanctity of marriage continued all through the scriptures, and will to the end of time. In general accordance with the customs of the place and time in which they live, men and women are to dress appropriately, so as not to draw undue attention to self, or to offend the standards of decent society. Deuteronomy 22:5 states: 'The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LoRd thy God.'

It has often been said that the family is the first church, the first school, the first civil government, and the first business. It is the foundation of all healthy society. Here in our twenty-first century, police reports indicate that most people in prisons never had a father who lived in the home. There are exceptions to this, but it is a widely proven principle. But it is not merely people in prison who were not raised in stable, two-parent families; it is a world-wide phenomenon among people of all classes. Sharon James has written:

Rates of fatherlessness in the twenty-first century are probably unprecedented. Globally, illegitimacy rates are rising dramatically By 2016, more than 60 per cent of children were born outside marriage in twenty-five countries This all means that fewer children experience the

unbroken stability of their own two natural parents staying together throughout their developing years. Fewer children have stable role models of a mother and a father. Fewer are able to experience positive role models of healthy masculinity and femininity.²²

That men and women live together in marriage is the basis of strong nations, and both see to the welfare of their family. In every era, and in different places, the tasks will be both similar and different. But both will work hard. Earlier we listed work done by men in the Old Testament, essential for survival and thriving. In Proverbs 31, we see a list of the deeds of a virtuous woman. She gladly and diligently works very hard, preparing wool and flax (v. 13), (presumably for sale); orders food stuffs (v. 14), sees to the needs of the household, including servants (v. 15); she is involved in purchasing real estate and in improving it (v. 16); she does excellent work in proving merchandise (v. 18); she spins (v. 19); she gives to the poor, and sees to it that her household is well clothed against the cold (vv. 20, 21); she makes the finest clothing (vv. 22, 24); her husband is proud of her before the community (v. 23); she speaks appropriately with kindness (v. 26); she keeps the household going, and is never idle (v. 27), and her husband and children are proud of her before the community (vv. 23, 25-31).

Monogamy

God's plan is revealed from the earliest portions of scripture as that of monogamous marriage. Adam and Eve were monogamous. Polygamy was seen only after the fall. Lamech, the proud, sinful descendant of Cain had two wives (Gen. 4:23). Leviticus 18:18 prohibited more than one wife at the time: 'Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time.' Christ said that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, which is the meaning of Genesis 2:24. That is, it is the union of two who are 'one flesh' (cf. Matt. 19:5). Paul describes marriage as monogamous: 'let every man have his own wife, and ... every woman ... her own husband' (1 Cor. 7:2). In 1 Timothy 3:2, bishops (elders) could have only one wife at the time, and this implies that others who became converted and joined the church, may have had more than one wife, but they could not be officers. But they were not required to cast out their other wives, for if they had been required to do so, then these former wives would likely have been forced into prostitution.

Yet some of the heroes of the faith, such as Abraham and Jacob, had more than one wife at the same time. Solomon had an immense number, many of them the results of political alliances. In the modern West, what we see is ‘serial polygamy’ – that is, through divorce, some men have several different wives in succession, perfectly legal, but not moral. Divorce and remarriage have done great damage to the children, and the problem of ‘blended families’ is not an easy one to solve (even where legitimate). In a certain sense, polygamy was tolerated in the Old Testament, but it was in the context of the fall into sin. It was not the original plan of God, nor was it the norm for the Christian Church.²³

Levirate Marriage

Marriage by a widowed man or woman to their in-laws was forbidden (as constituting incest), but there was an exception. If a man died childless, then his next of kin had the duty to marry his bereaved wife, so as to raise up descendants in his name. This law was operative (before Moses) in the case of Judah (Gen. 38:8) and functioned in Ruth. Josephus explained it this way: ‘... for this procedure will be for the benefit of the public, because thereby families will not fail, and the estate will continue among the kindred; and this will be for the solace of wives under their affliction, that they are to be married to the next relation of their former husbands.’²⁴

John Calvin explains it as a sort of benefit to the dead man:

This law has some similarity with that which permits a betrothed person to return to his wife, whom he has not yet taken; since the object of both is to preserve to every man what he possesses, so that he may not be obliged to leave it to strangers, but that he may have heirs begotten of his own body: for when a son succeeds to the father, whom he represents, there seems to be hardly any change made. Hence, too, it is manifest how greatly pleasing to God it is that no one should be deprived of his property, since He makes a provision even for the dying, that what they could not resign to others without regret and annoyance, should be preserved to their offspring. Unless, therefore, his kinsman should obviate the dead man’s childlessness, this unhumanity is accounted a kind of theft. For, since to be childless was a curse of God, it was a consolation in this condition to hope for a borrowed offspring, that the name might not be altogether extinct.²⁵

Purity

In close connection with love and submission is the principle of purity within marriage. While no marriage is perfect, nonetheless there is an abiding mainstay of purity between husband and wife, so that each gives oneself to the other exclusively, and keeps his or her eyes off others. We will all do well to identify with Job, when he says: ‘I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?’ (Job 31:1). A thought-life that sends away impure sexual thoughts helps make for a clear conscience, which is at the basis of a strong and happy life, and of well-informed choices in family, church, the economy, and the state.

Impure ‘loves’ can be expelled by that ‘hope [that] maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ (Rom. 5:5). It is important to call to mind that our past sexual sins, when sincerely repented of, are covered by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:9). We are then set free to walk as Christ walked (1 John 2:6). Hence we have an anointing by the Holy Spirit, which gives us confidence for now and for the future (1 John 2:27-29). Through the propitiation of Christ, which fully satisfied the wrath of God (1 John 4:10), we are now enabled to live in love, both to God and to others (1 John 4:7-11).

What a blessing to any country is a large number of people who ‘have made this covenant with their eyes!’ Many years ago, G. Campbell Morgan described it as follows: ‘The greatness of a people depends upon the purity and strength of the people, and in every nation where the marriage relation is violated with impunity, the virus of death is surely and certainly at work. This is at once proved by the lurid lights that flash from the decay of Assyria, Greece, Rome, and in our own times, of France also.²⁶ In this respect it is most true that “righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”’²⁷

Homosexuality

Both Old and New Testaments speak of homosexual activity, and without exception disapprove of it.

(1) *Old Testament*. It is forbidden in Leviticus 18 and 20: ‘Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination’ (Lev. 18:22). ‘If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have

committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them' (Lev. 20:13). This sort of activity goes directly against the created order and is therefore an abomination (foul and unclean).

The ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were judged by fiery destruction from the Lord, particularly owing to their widespread homosexual activity. They were also guilty of other sins (such as lack of mercy to the poor – cf. Ezek. 16:47-50), but one of their major sins is denounced as an 'abomination' in Ezekiel 16:50. Jude 7 states: 'Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.'

(2) *New Testament*. Kevin De Young writes (after showing how Peter and Paul base a good part of their call to holiness on Leviticus): 'The authors of the New Testament did not hesitate to turn to Leviticus, the preeminent book on holiness in their Bibles, to find instruction and exhortation for godly living. In I Corinthians 5, Paul appeals directly to the law of Moses – Leviticus 18:8; Deuteronomy 22:30; 27:20 – to establish the sinfulness of incest (a move he makes again in I Corinthians 6 with respect to homosexuality). Paul found in Leviticus moral obligations still binding on the Christian. The sexual ethic of the Old Testament was not abrogated like the sacrificial system, but carried forward into the early church ...'²⁸

Later, DeYoung discusses two Greek words from the New Testament: *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*. Both of these words are used in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, or idolaters, or adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind (*oude malakoi oude arsenokoitai*) ... shall inherit the kingdom of God.'

According to DeYoung, '*arsenokoitai* ... is a compound of man (*arsen*) and bed (*koite*) and could be literally translated 'bedders of men' ... *arsenokoitai* carries the basic meaning: 'men who have sex with other men.'²⁹ He shows that there are at least eight 'vice lists' in the New Testament, and that sexual immorality (which precludes those who do not repent from entering the kingdom) is included in every one of them (Mark 7:21-22; Rom. 1:24-31; 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; Rev. 21:8).

In Romans 1:18-32, Paul gives a dreadful list of degenerate human behaviors that elicit the wrath of God. Among this list are those involved in having sex with others of their own gender, a strong sign of reprobation:

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet (vv. 26-27).

DeYoung quotes an interview with N. T. Wright: ‘Nowhere does Paul or any other Jewish writer of the period imply the least acceptance of same-sex relations under any circumstances. The idea that homosexuals might be redeemed by mutual devotion would have been wholly foreign to Paul or any Jew or early Christian.’³⁰

Born This Way

Many in the homosexual community say that they were born this way. That may be true. According to the American Psychiatric Association, ‘the causes of sexual orientation (whether homosexual or heterosexual) are not known to us at this time and likely are multifactorial including biological and behavioral roots which may vary between different individuals and may even vary over time.’³¹ All of us are born of fallen stock; our kinks go all the way back to Adam. Some kinks are more acceptable than others, depending on the society and the time. But we are all flawed, and in no position to be harsh to anyone else who is also flawed.

And yet it is most important to say that the Church stands with arms outstretched to sinners of every sort, including homosexuals, as they repent and come home! 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 mentions homosexuals as now, through faith in Christ, being ‘washed, sanctified, and justified.’ Their very bodies are now members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15), and temples of the Holy Spirit (vv. 16, 19). The blood of Christ covers sexual sins of every sort, for it cleanses from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

The Church, however, often is not perceived to be welcoming to homosexuals. The 2019-20 ‘Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality’ (of the Presbyterian Church in America) openly confesses:

It is a sad reality that some Christians in our churches who experience same-sex attraction have found limited support and encouragement in their desire to follow Christ. While the reasons for this reality vary, one of the most critical components to faithful discipleship is a deep-rooted connection in a local body of believers who can provide challenge, encouragement, and a strong sense of belonging. We ought to grieve any time a person who experiences attraction toward the same sex finds a greater welcome and belonging in the secular LGBT community instead of the church.³²

Nearly fifty years ago, Presbyterian Pastor Jerry Kirk, whose church ministered to homosexuals (back in the 1970s), wrote an exhortation to those who wished to do likewise in a changing culture: ‘Would the homosexual see in you the gentleness and kindness of Jesus? Harsh words have tightened the graveclothes around him. Kind words can loose them. I can’t say enough about this. Cruel words and jokes hurt these sensitive people so deeply. Their wounds are raw and sore. As you gently remove the rag covering the wound, it might be stuck. And he might scream out in pain, “No, don’t. It hurts too much! Don’t pull it off.” But here’s where our love has to be tough. The bandage must come off so the wound can get air and heal. But go slowly, be gentle.’³³

Pornography

‘Pornography’ is made up of ‘writing’ (or graphical representation) and some form of the Greek word *porneia*: thus, ‘representation of *porneia*.’ It comes from the verb *pernamí* – ‘to sell’ (especially of slaves as ‘harlot for hire’).³⁴ Sometimes it is used of ‘whoredom’ (cf. Gen. 38:24; Ezek. 23: 11, 29, etc.). Cult prostitution seeped over from Canaanite cults into Israel (e.g. 1 Kings 22:46). Good King Josiah destroyed the house of the cult prostitutes near the Temple (2 Kings 23:7). Hosea depicted the apostasy of Israel from the Lord in terms of *porneia* (Hosea 1:2; 3:1–4:4, as does Jeremiah – cf. Jer. 2:20; 3:6).

‘The NT is characterized by an unconditional repudiation of all extra-marital and unnatural intercourse.’³⁵ Especially in the writings of Paul: ‘... the concrete directions of Paul bring to the attention of Gentile Christians the incompatibility of *porneia* and the kingdom of God In the shameful vices of unnatural sex relations, which spread like a plague in the Graeco-

Roman world of his day, Paul sees the outworking of a severe judgment of God (Rom. 1:18ff).'³⁶

In our modern Western world, pornography is a multi-billion-dollar (pound, euro) business.³⁷ The directors who film both hetero-sexual and homosexual scenes of intercourse naturally choose the most handsome models, and have them portray very unrealistic representations of happy, carefree, and successful interactions, with never a problem. It is not true to life and is likely to leave those who watch such things disappointed in their own real-life experiences. It is a sort of mental adultery, or voyeurism; not compatible with a heart that is seeking to be pure and true. It tends to take one's attention off one's own wife or husband and can easily lead to coldness and disinterest towards one's spouse. The instructions of Paul are right to the point here: 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light....And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret' (Eph. 5:8, 11-12).

Apparently, considerable usage of pornography can actually change how one's brain functions. William Struthers explains: 'The behaviors that we engage in affect our thinking. The interaction between thought and body is rooted in the neurobiology of the brain. Thoughts and behavior are woven together and intertwined with one another. This is how pornography and unhealthy sexuality pollutes the brain and the body together.'³⁸

Jonathan Grant compares pornographic usage to drug addiction:

All addiction involves long-term, sometimes permanent 'neuro-plastic' change in the brain. The power of addictive substances/behaviors lies in their hijacking of our dopamine system, so that they give us pleasure without our having to work for it. Dopamine, known as the 'pleasure chemical,' is an important neurotransmitter and plays a significant role in permanent changes to the brain Dopamine's key role in both sex and addiction underscores the magnetic force of pornography ... when sexual arousal becomes connected to viewing pornography, these two activities become strongly associated in our brains. The more we engage in the habit, the more these connections are fused together in our neural circuits ³⁹

It is therefore a matter seriously to be avoided by followers of the Lord. Pornography is very addictive, at least as much as drugs. It is much easier to get into it than out of it! But it is not impossible to get out of it, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the inspired Word, to help us mortify lustful desires of our fallen flesh, as well as the continuing assistance of the fellowship of the Church. Pornography is also destructive of marriage, if persisted in by one of the partners.

Jonathan Grant notes: 'Family lawyers are seeing a growing influence of pornography in divorces. At a meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers – comprising the nation's top sixteen hundred divorce and matrimonial attorneys – nearly two-thirds said they had seen a sudden increase in divorces related to the internet, with 56 per cent of their divorce cases involving one party having an obsessive interest in online pornography.'⁴⁰

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has a fine discussion of pornography:

2354 *Pornography* consists in removing real or stimulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity, because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials.

Transgender

People who identify with the opposite sex (or gender) with which they themselves were born are now called 'transgender'. Andrew T. Walker defines it: 'Transgender is an umbrella term for the state or condition of identifying or expressing a gender identity that does not match a person's genetic sex.'⁴¹ Sometimes it is called 'gender dysphoria'.⁴² The entire gender theory 'is relatively new There is no scientific evidence to back up the idea that we all have a "gender identity" that can be separated from our biological sex.'⁴³ Indeed, 'The word "gender" has been hijacked. Sex is a biological and bodily reality. Gender is the social expression of that

physical reality. The word “gender” is often *misused* to imply that it can be *separated* from bodily reality.’⁴⁴

Attitudes in the wider public have shifted towards greater acceptance of this phenomenon, and this has been reflected in professional psychological terminology. Vaughan Roberts discusses this change: ‘One significant sign of the change in public attitudes is seen in the language that is used. The 1994 *US Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* referred to cross-gender identification as “gender identity disorder”. The next edition in 2013 describes the same phenomenon as “gender dysphoria”, so that the emphasis is not on gender incongruence as a disorder, but rather, on the distress associated with it.’⁴⁵ ‘Increasingly, to say that transgender feelings are an indicator of a mental disorder is regarded as discrimination.’⁴⁶

This kind of thinking flourished in that late twentieth century, when much of the western world rejected the authority of God speaking in Holy Scripture, to follow the desires of the flesh – at times, lustful – presumably without feeling guilt. That was certainly a concern of Sigmund Freud, who in the nineteenth century sought to discredit Biblical religion as guilt-causing, and to liberate people from its nefarious influence on the psychology of the human person. Though Freud is now considered dated, he helped work a seismic change in views of proper sexuality. His type of thinking fitted in with the self-centeredness of modern society: ‘The sexual revolution tells me that the highest goal is self-fulfillment, achieved through following my feelings, and relativism makes it possible for me to pursue these goals without anyone being allowed to say, “No, that’s wrong.”’⁴⁷

Again, as with addiction to pornography and homosexuality, it is not easy to trace any particular cause for the transgender phenomenon. Andrew Walker writes: ‘The best research has offered no conclusive evidence that experiences of gender dysphoria are the result of any particular factor or factors.’⁴⁸ From the Scriptural teaching about the fall of Adam, in which his descendants fell in him, we know that all inclinations to sin come from our fallen condition. Sexual dysfunction is not the only one: pride, self-centeredness, anger, and so forth are stem from our fallen humanity. It is always important for the church not to make sexual sinners feel that they are the only sinners, or that every sexual sin is necessarily worse than hatred or pride. We must all claim by faith the cleansing blood of Christ, shed for every kind of sin, including ours. We who have been forgiven by

the grace of God never have any grounds for looking down on others. We must make that clear to people who are feeling ashamed.

It is also significant to remember that our feelings (even the worst ones) and our sins do not define who we are. Our identity is in Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us. That is who we are, even when we have fallen beneath what He called us to be. Vaughan Roberts has well stated: ‘If you’re a Christian facing this battle, can I also say that this struggle, these feelings, *do not define you*? They may at least partly, describe *how* you are, but they do not describe *who* you are.’⁴⁹

Honor

Instead of shame for our far-from-perfect, and often checkered past, God, in His great mercy, puts His own honor upon us. He puts it upon us who have no official or in any way famous standing. If we have sought to be faithful in marriage, and in whatever ministry He has given us (even when almost no one else notices), He puts honor upon us, for having served Him in our own little corner. It is almost impossible to take in. In that regard, Karl Barth has some remarkable words applying Revelation 2:10 (‘Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life’):

Not only the great warriors and sufferers and believers belonged to the people of God in the Old Testament and the Church in the New, but many concerning whose fidelity, service and witness we know nothing at all, because they were not distinguished in any one direction and were thus in no position to leave us their names. For surely their names are nonetheless written in heaven even though no spirits were subject to them either one way or the other.

And this poses a question in relation to the theological practice of the Church. Most of those to whom we turn the ministry of the Word belong to these little ones in the middle, so that they do not want to be told either about their honour, but simply about their faithfulness or unfaithfulness as these little ones, as these prospective knights of a completely or almost completely uneventful routine. And is it not more salutary as well as supremely comforting for us to accept the truth that we are to be numbered with them, without prejudice to what we must think and say concerning the

majesty and richness of the ways of God leading both to the heights and the depths, yet also in face of the fact that there is this whole middle sphere in which God commands and allows man to follow his paths?⁵⁰

The Eighth Commandment

Thou shalt not steal (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).

Charles Hodge has rightly said that ‘The foundation of the right of property is the will of God.’⁵¹ He adds: ‘By this is meant, (1) That God has so constituted man that he desires and needs this right of the exclusive possession and use of certain things. (2) Having made man a social being, He has made the right of property essential to the healthful development of human society. (3) He has implanted a sense of justice in the nature of man, which condemns as morally wrong everything inconsistent with the right in question. (4) He has declared in his Word that any and every violation of this right is sinful.’⁵²

Hodge correctly states: ‘So the right of property is anterior and independent of the necessity of its being held sacred, in order to secure the well-being of mankind. The fact is, that the right of property is analogous to the right of life; it is not given by man; and it cannot be ignored, or arbitrarily interfered with by man. It rests on the will of God, as revealed in the constitution of our nature, and in our relation to persons and things around us.’⁵³

The necessity and propriety of property goes back to God’s creation of mankind in His image, by which he was given dominion over the created order (cf. Gen. 1:26-28). As Hodge wrote: ‘Property ... is specially designed to enable a man to discharge his moral duties.’⁵⁴ That is, property is essential for people to carry out the divine call to take appropriate dominion around them, including the subduing of the earth. ‘Property is the means for the development of the individuality of the man.’⁵⁵

Lest we read these statements from Hodge as a bare defense of modern Western capitalism built upon the economic rights of the individual, we can look further back to Calvin, then Aquinas. In Calvin we see the emphasis not on individual rights and dominion but on love, for he places the eighth commandment in the context of love.

Since charity is the end of the Law, we must seek the definition of theft from thence. This, then, is the rule of charity, that every one's rights should be safely preserved, and that none should do to another what he would not have done to himself. It follows, therefore, that not only are those thieves who secretly steal the property of others, but those also who seek for gain from the loss of others, accumulate wealth by unlawful practices, and are more devoted to their private advantage than to equity. Thus, rapine is comprehended under the head of theft, since there is no difference between a man's robbing his neighbour by fraud or force.⁵⁶

In Aquinas, we see similarly a focus on material goods and resources not as a means of personal happiness but rather, of motivating a work ethic rooted in virtue for the building up of the wider community.⁵⁷

One could think of various forms of fraud by firms and corporations. Sometimes it is as simple as a large firm refusing to pay a small one for several months, in order to earn the interest. This is theft. It may be more complex, such as large and powerful corporations pushing the civil government to enact costly regulations, that they themselves can well afford, but that might put their smaller competitors out of business. This is theft. It may involve using cheaper building material for construction, while charging as much as for solid parts. This is theft. It may involve a practice as old as watering down wine, and yet pretending that it is pure vintage. This is theft – and it can be the same with other food-stuffs.

Property normally comes to a person by inheritance, a gift, or by work and savings and investment. Ultimately, it comes from the blessing of God: 'The blessing of the LoRd, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it' (Prov. 10:22). Sometimes (though certainly not always), obedience to the Lord is blessed by wealth (Ps. 112:3). Apart from inheritance and gifts, work is the main source of prosperity. 'Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase' (Prov. 13:11).

Alexander Whyte of Edinburgh succinctly summarized the origin of property when he wrote:

...all matters connected with the earning, saving, spending, inheriting and bequeathing of money and property All a man's possessions, go back to the beginning of them, go down to the bottom of them, will always be found to represent so much self-denial, labour, industry. Obscure as may be

the origin, history, and growth of this or that particular estate, yet it must in its beginning have been due to some man's obedience to the Creator's law of labour and reward. 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.' This is the original charter of the right of property.⁵⁸

One aspect of Communism that is most hated and feared by traditionally free Christian people is its removal of private property rights in order for the state to take control of all of it. Lenin, in the 'Decrees and Constitution of Soviet Russia', abolished 'all property rights in the land, treasures of the earth, waters, forests and fundamental natural resources.'⁵⁹ An individual can commit theft, and a state can commit theft. This is theft by the state, and it results in the people's losing control of their own lives, to a large degree.

One of the worst forms of stealing is stealing a person's reputation. The ninth commandment says: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour' (Exod. 20: 16). Proverbs 22:1 tells us: 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold.'

Unfairly to besmirch a person's good name is far worse than taking his money. Paul feared this among the Corinthians: 'For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you as I would ... lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults ...' (2 Cor. 12:20). Instead, he enjoined Christians: 'Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man' (Col. 4:6). This type of gracious speech about others is based on the love of God within the believers, for according to 1 Corinthians 13: 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ...' (vv. 4, 5).

To speak well of others, indicates an inner satisfaction that comes from a right relationship to the Lord. It is a chief blessing of contentment, that is spoken of in I Timothy 6:6: 'But godliness with contentment is great gain.' We cannot have this divinely derived contentment without true godliness, and that can only come through faith in the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Christ, implanted in us by His Holy Spirit.

Wilhelmus à Brakel shows that contentment goes back to who God Himself is: 'The word "contentment" in Hebrew is *dai*, that is, fullness, abundance, and sufficiency. Frequently this word is attributed to God. The

Lord calls himself *El Shaddai*, that is, the God who possesses everything and who is able to bring forth everything out of his fullness. It is generally translated as “the Almighty One.” In Greek the word is *autarkeia* which is a coalescence of two words: “being sufficient” and “self.”

À Brakel then applies this to the soul of the Christian: ‘Contentment is a Christian virtue consisting in a correspondence between the desire of God’s children and their present condition – this being true because it is the will of their God in Christ and according to his sovereign determination. In this they rest with delight ...’⁶⁰

People can waste their entire lives seeking for some kind of contentment without ever submitting to the salvation freely offered by a gracious God. R. J. Rushdoony traces the lineaments of this kind of false and tragic seeking of inner satisfaction in his *Politics of Guilt and Pity*.⁶¹ He argues that masochism (punishment of self) and sadism (cruelty to others) are ways of working out that which cannot be worked out by any mere human: infinite guilt against God. He quotes Theodore Reik: ‘Neurosis is undoubtedly a masochistic function.’⁶² He holds that such things as gambling, alcoholism, and purposeful failure are aspects of this masochism.⁶³ Rushdoony writes: ‘The gambler knows that the odds are against him: he gambles to lose, with an unconscious will to lose, to punish himself for his guilt, and cleanse, although vainly, his conscience.’⁶⁴

Sadism is the other side of the coin: it is also a way of humanistic atonement for sin. Rushdoony says, ‘In sadism, self-punishment involves also a transfer of guilt to an innocent party. It is a form of revenge against the innocent for their innocence, and an attempt to reduce them to the same level of impotence and guilt.’⁶⁵

If Rushdoony’s analysis is right, burdened by guilt that is truly unrelieved (through the vain attempts made in both masochism and sadism), an ‘unfreed’ people tend to look to a redemptive state: ‘In the politics of guilt, man is perpetually drained in his social energy and cultural activity, by his over-riding sense of guilt and his masochistic activity. He will progressively demand of the state a redemptive role. What he cannot do personally, i.e., to save himself, he demands that the state do for him, so that the state, as man enlarged, becomes the human savior of man.’⁶⁶

Sexuality and Violence

A long history of police reports indicates that violence is very often associated with illegitimate sexual practices. It certainly exists in legitimate marriages, but is far less likely there. John Murray states (in the context of studying the mysterious *Nephilim* in the early chapters of Genesis): ‘The degeneration presupposed in, and again resulting from, these unholy alliances provided fruitful soil for the violence with which the *Nephilim* played a decisive role. The breakdown of moral and religious restraints evidenced by these marital alliances gave rein to the vice of violence and oppression. The indulgence of sex vice in any form kindles the flames of passion which break out in other directions, particularly in the direction of violence.’⁶⁷

But on the contrary, God has provided marriage as the healthy place to bring up children, and also as the bond of peace in all society. True marriage massively reduces societal violence. For instance, most males in American prisons did not grow up with a father in the home. Of course, fatherlessness in no sense guarantees prison in the offspring, but at least statistics show that it is more likely. Police reports indicate that gangs often replace the family in the lives of rootless young men. Professor Thomas Sowell (a distinguished African-American economist) has discussed this sad matter.⁶⁸

But the Lord has a better way to bring up young people: raise them in a married family. It is not the fault of youth that this is not possible for many of them, and one has to be considerate and merciful in such cases (which may be beyond number in this twenty-first century). Here, the church can help, although it is not the task of the church to replace the family. Yet the people of God can stand in for missing family members and do what they can to shape the youth in a godly direction. Maggie Gallagher has discussed the benefit for children of living in a home with two parents.⁶⁹ What an opportunity for the church today to demonstrate the wholesome blessings of solid families before a massively dysfunctional society that is rotting from within, owing to all sorts of illegitimate sexual practices among those who are past puberty!

Paul teaches husbands to love their wives, and wives to submit to their husbands (e.g. Eph. 5:22-26), and he teaches older wives to instruct younger wives to love their husbands (Titus 2:4,5). The love between husbands and wives is the foundation of the healthy development of the

children, which is the basic constituency of the church, and the solid context of its mission to a lost world.

Peter exhorts elders of the church: 'Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock' (1 Pet. 5:2-3). They may do so, because along with all the other true Christians, God is in them: '... for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (2 Cor. 6:16). Thus, Christ lives in them (cf. Gal. 2:20, and Col. 1:27), and they live in Christ (cf. Col. 1:10-12).

Saint Paul, instead of looking to the Roman State, instructed the people of the church to work hard enough to meet their own needs, and to have enough left over to help others: 'Let him that stole, steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth' (Eph. 4:28). Wealth, of whatever measure, is not in the absolute power of humans; it is the stewardship they have to God, and they must use it in light of His character. Soon enough, they must give an accounting to Him for how they used it (cf. Matt. 25), and soon enough either they must leave it, or it will leave them. All they can keep is what they gave to God and His cause.

The Ideal Financial Situation

We are given the ideal financial situation in Proverbs 30:7-9: 'Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die; Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.' Being satisfied with who we are, *whose* we are, and where we are, removes from us the utter disquiet of wanting to stand higher, particularly, above some others of whom we may be jealous or envious.⁷⁰

The key is to place our affection on Christ, and what is ours in Him; then we will be enabled to mortify in ourselves the things that should be put to death, so that His life may spring forth. 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life,

shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth ...' (Col. 3:1-5).

As an evangelical hymn states:

Peace, perfect peace,
In this dark world of sin;
The blood of Jesus whisper
speace within.⁷¹

Restitution

Holy Scripture requires restitution for stealing, when possible. Leviticus 5:14-16 specifies:

And the LoRd spake unto Moses, saying, If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the LoRd; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the LoRd a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering: And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.

Similarly, Numbers 5:5-10 requires the addition of a fifth part to make right what was stolen:

And the LoRd spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LoRd, and that person shall be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LoRd, even to the priest: beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him. And every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring unto the priest, shall be his. And every man's hallowed things shall be his: whatsoever any man giveth the priest, shall be his.

In Romans 13:9 Paul provides a summary of the second table of the Law. He begins by quoting the commandments six through ten ('Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal,' etc.), then he provides a synthesis of the entirety of the Torah in a simple phrase – 'and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' All of the law hinges upon love. He explains, 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling (*pleroma*) of the law' (Rom 13:10).

In the life of Zacchaeus we find how the seeds of such love for neighbor grew out into concrete action. After living a life of theft and extortion as a publican (Luke declares him even as 'the chief of publicans'), everything changes when he meets Jesus. Hearing Christ's personal words directed to him high up in the sycamore tree, he 'made haste, and came down, and received [Jesus] joyfully' (Luke 19:6) His reception of Jesus as Lord, however, produces real change in his life: 'Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost' (Luke 19:8-10).

We find a further example in Paul's letter to Philemon, where he offers to repay Philemon for his run-away slave, who had become converted. However, he rightly reminds Philemon what he had done for him: 'I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides' (v. 19). The supreme example is that Christ restored that which He did not owe, and gave back that which He did not take away: 'Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law' (Rom. 13:8). 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit ...' (1 Pet. 3:18).

The Ninth Commandment

Thou shalt not bear false against thy neighbour (Exod. 20:16; cf. Deut. 19:16-20).

Truth is rooted in who God is

This obviously means that we are to be truthful, so that we reflect the character of God, who is pure truth. The very first thing God said in the darkness of the new and undivided creation was ‘Let there be light’ (Gen. 1:3). ‘God is light, and in him is no darkness at all’ (1 John 1:5). The Lord Jesus Christ said: ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me’ (John 14:6). He said in John 6:63: ‘... the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.’ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are truth, and all of their words are truth. Jesus says in His high priestly prayer: ‘Thy word is truth’ (John 17:17). The section of the Hebrew letter Lamed in Psalm 119:89-96 testifies: ‘Forever, O LoRd, thy word is settled in heaven Unless thy law had been my delights, I should have then perished in mine affliction I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.’

Since God Himself founded the church, Paul states that ‘the church of the living God [is] the pillar and ground of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3:15). In and through the church we meet Christ, who is the truth, and by His impartation of the Spirit of Truth, our eyes are opened to discern what is true. Calvin comments:

The reason why the church is called the ‘pillar of truth’ is, that she defends and spreads it by her agency. God does not himself come down from heaven to us, nor does he daily send angels to make known his truth; but he employs pastors, whom he has appointed for that purpose. To express it in a more homely manner, is not the Church the mother of all believers? Does she not regenerate them by the word of God, educate and nourish them through their whole life, strengthen, and bring them at length to absolute perfection?⁷²

Truth is Rooted in the constitution of human nature

Therefore, God’s total veracity in what He says is to be reflected in the truthfulness of His image-bearers. This precludes us from bearing false witness since we reflect who God is. As David says in Psalm 51:6: ‘Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.’ The prayer of David in Psalm 139:23, 24 reflects this concern: ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me

in the way everlasting.’ Thus, the speaking of truth is rooted in the deepest part of what it is to be human.

The nineteenth-century Southern Presbyterian theologian, James Henley Thornwell, brought this out:

The will of God is expressed in the constitution of the human mind. There are two things naturally imprinted on every human mind by God. The first thing is that we naturally are prompted to speak the truth. The second thing is that we naturally are prompted to believe other people when they speak it. No man ever tells a lie without a certain degree of violence of his nature. Why am I bound to speak the truth? Simply because it is the law of our nature. It is a fundamental datum of conscience, a command of God impressed upon the moral structure of the soul.⁷³

Truth is a substantial constituent of God’s holiness, and He has firmly stated: ‘For I am the LoRd your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy ...’ (Lev. 11:44), which is quoted exactly in the New Testament: ‘But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy’ (1 Pet. 1: 15, 16). To be holy as God is holy requires at every point truthfulness. True testimony is required in court:

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LoRd (Lev. 19: 15,16).

False witness is prohibited in the courts, and Exodus 23:1-7 shows that it has broad ramifications beyond the judicial system:

Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment: Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause. If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

Slander in particular is forbidden by this commandment; as Leviticus 19:16 says above, it is a standing against the blood of one's neighbour. It is meant to do harm. Ginsburg, a Jewish scholar, wrote:

This dangerous habit which has ruined the character and destroyed the life of many an innocent person ... was denounced by the spiritual authorities in the time of Christ as the greatest sin. Three things they declared remove a man from this world and deprive him of happiness in the world to come – idolatry, incest, and murder, but slander surpasses them all. It kills three persons with one act, the person who slanders, the person who is slandered, and the person who listens to the slander.⁷⁴

The prayer of David in Psalm 139:23,24 reflects this concern: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' Thus, the speaking of truth is rooted in the deepest part of what it is to be human. This may be why the Fall so disfigured mankind. When given the opportunity to speak the truth, conforming themselves to the Lord who is Truth, man refused to confess 'truth in his inner parts', choosing instead the path of guilt, hiding and blame – the way of the serpent (Gen. 3:8-13).

Times when truth can rightfully be withheld

Let us take an extreme example: a murderous thief breaks into a house where there is a mother and her child. She does right to hide the child and lie to the murderer by saying that no child is there. Robert L. Dabney discusses this kind of case: '... the parties ... being engaged in an evil act, have no right to the truth ... the lesser duty (truth-telling) gives place to the greater duty, saving a child's life from unjust destruction ... the Bible instances of intentional deception are recorded of the saints, as Abraham, Gen. xx.2; Samuel, I Sam. xvi. 1-2; Elisha, II Kings vi. 14-20; Joshua, Joshua viii. 3.'⁷⁵

The Tenth Commandment

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's (Exod. 20:17; cf. Deut. 5:21).

Let us think specifically of the Parable of the Rich Young Ruler and Christ's response to his question, 'what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?' (Matt. 19:16). Jesus responds by quoting commandments six, seven, eight and nine in sequence. But note that He then skips over the tenth commandment and returns to commandment five. The point is that the rich young ruler believed he had followed the commandments (at least, externally) as he declares, 'All these things have I kept from my youth up.' And when he asks, 'what lack I yet?', only then does Christ give the tenth commandment. 'If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me' (Matt. 19:21).

Jesus understood that it was covetousness that was controlling his heart and blinding him to realities of the Gospel. With this seed planted in his soul, he could not bear to have it rooted out.⁷⁶ As such, 'he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions' (Matt. 19:22). His love of this world, his holding onto its transient possessions, drove him into the depths of sorrow. The Gospel writer uses the word, *lypeo*, which he will use again of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane when He is taking into His being the sins of the world – 'And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy' (Matt. 26:37).

The Puritan Thomas Watson is particularly insightful on this commandment. He asks: 'What is it to covet?' Answer: 'There are two words in the Greek which set forth the nature of covetousness. *Pleonexia*, which signifies an "insatiable desire of getting the world" ... Augustine defines covetousness *Plus velle quam sat est*; "to desire more than enough".... The other word is *Philarguria*, which signifies an "inordinate love of the world."⁷⁷

This overweening love of a quickly passing world is endemic to our fallen Adamic condition. 1 John 2:15-17 gives a graphic description of this world in terms of what we physically see and lust after: 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.'

But God has appointed a better way. The famous Scottish theologian of the nineteenth century, Thomas Chalmers, once preached a sermon on 'The

Expulsive Power of a New Affection.’ As he was traveling on a stagecoach, he noticed that the driver kept snapping the whip beside the face of the horse as they rounded a dangerous curve in the road. The driver explained that it was to attract the horse’s attention away from the precipice. Chalmers decided to preach on this principle. He saw that the love of God coming into our hearts diverted our attention away from places of falling, hence, ‘The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.’ Similarly, an experience of the love of God keeps us from coveting what others have. As Calvin said: ‘The purpose of this commandment is: since God wills that our whole soul be possessed with a disposition to love, we must banish from our hearts all desire contrary to love.’⁷⁸

This precludes any actions intended to take advantage of whatever our neighbor has, be it a material possession or his union in marriage, by any unlawful means. This does not forbid aspirations of doing better, only of breaking God’s law in order to do so. This clearly forbids one’s trying to alienate the affections of someone’s wife in order to attract her to himself. It forbids interfering in his business matters so as to destabilize that business (perhaps by a whispering campaign against the owner to his employees, or the other firms with which he trades) so that one can buy up his business at a price far lower than it is worth. It forbids concocting lies in a political campaign against one’s opponent in order to win the election, as we see to this day.

Thomas Watson asked the right question: ‘What is the cure for this covetousness?’⁷⁹ Let us follow his answers: (1) Faith: ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith’ (1 John 5:4). He adds: ‘This faith is a remedy against covetousness; it overcomes, not only the fear of the world, but the love of the world.’⁸⁰ (2) ‘Judicious considerations.’ ‘The creature has a little honey in its mouth, but it has wings to fly away. These things either go from us, or we from them. What poor things are they to covet!’⁸¹ (3) ‘The third remedy for covetousness is to covet spiritual things more If we covet heaven more, we shall covet earth less.’⁸² (4) ‘The fourth remedy is to pray for a heavenly mind Were our hearts raised by the power of the Holy Ghost up to heaven we should not be much taken up with earthly things.’⁸³

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 2. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1856), pp.358-59.
 3. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, III, p. 17.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., p. 341.
 6. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, volume 1* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1974), p. lxxvii.
 7. Francis Turretin, op. cit., p. 107.
 8. By P. P. Bliss.
 9. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, III, pp. 20-21.
 10. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Magnes Press: Jerusalem, The Hebrew University, 1967), p. 28.
 11. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, p. 415.
 12. Augustine, *Epistle* 229.2.
 13. Augustine, *Epistle* 189.9; *De Civitate Dei* 19.7.
 14. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22, pp. 76, 79.
 15. Augustine, *qu. Hept.* 6, p.10.
 16. Ibid., 4. 44; 6, p. 10.
 17. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22, pp. 74-75. See F. H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 16-26.
 18. Turretin, op. cit., p. 113.
 19. Ibid.
 20. Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex*, 157.
 21. See Symeon the New Theologian, *The First Created Man: Seven Homilies*, selected and translated by Fr. Seraphim Rose (Platina, CA: Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2001), p. 46.
 22. Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What do Christians Need to Know?* (Christian Focus: Geanies House, Fearn, 2019), p. 100.
 23. See Denny Burk, *What is the Meaning of Sex* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL., 2013).
 24. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book IV, Chapter VIII, p. 23.
 25. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, III. 177, p. 8.
 26. One must add here that the entire Western world in the twenty-first century is every bit as guilty as Morgan considered France to be in the late nineteenth century.
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 28. Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, p. 44.
 29. Ibid., pp. 63, 65.
 30. Ibid., p. 86.
 31. 'Position Statement on Homosexuality,' American Psychiatric Association, 2013, www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Learn/Archives/ps2013, quoted in DeYoung, op. cit., pp. 110-11.
 32. Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality, (2019-2020) of the Presbyterian Church in America, p. 31.

33. Jerry Kirk, *The Homosexual Crisis in the Mainline Church* (Thomas Nelson Inc. Publishers: Nashville, 1978), p. 133.
34. Hauck/Schulz, *porna, etc.* in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Kittel and Friedrich, eds., Transl. by G. W. Bromiley, Volume VI Pe-R (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), p. 580.
35. Ibid., p. 590.
36. Ibid., p. 593.
37. 'It should come as no surprise to anyone that pornography is big business. The estimated financial size of the worldwide sex industry is around \$57 billion, with \$12 billion (just over 20 percent) coming from the United States', quoted in William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy. How pornography hijacks the male brain* (IVP Books: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2009), p. 20.
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41. 41. Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate* (The Good Book Company: Norhaven, Denmark, 2018), p. 34.
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44. Ibid., p. 45.
45. 45. Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (The Good Book Company: Norhaven, Denmark, 2016), pp. 30, 31.
46. James, op. cit., p. 29.
47. Walker, op. cit., p. 41.
48. Ibid., p. 34.
49. Roberts, op. cit., p. 66.
50. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III. 4*, p. 677.
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52. Ibid., p. 421.
53. Ibid., p. 425.
54. Ibid., p. 426.
55. Ibid., p. 425.
56. Calvin, *Commentary on the Last Four Books of Moses*, III, pp. 110-11.
57. (cf. Summa Theologica, Part I-II, Q66 OF THEFT AND ROBBERY (NINE ARTICLES) Article. 1 - Whether it is natural for man to possess external things? Article. 2 - Whether it is lawful for a man to possess a thing as his own? See <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3066.htm>. Also see Mary Hirschfeld, *Aquinas and the Market: Toward a Humane Economy* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2018).
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66. Ibid., p. 9.
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74. Ginsburg, 'Leviticus,' in Ellicott, I, p. 424.
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CHAPTER 15

THE LORD'S PRAYER

God saves us so that we may live in fellowship with Him, and a large part of that fellowship is expressed in prayer, and also, at times, in fasting. Christ teaches us specifically how to pray in 'the Lord's Prayer'. Through prayer we engage in a vast spiritual battle for the Lord, against the powers of evil.

Over the centuries, Christian theologians have often summarized the faith by going through: the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. We have looked at the main truths of the Apostles' Creed in the first two volumes of this series. Now in this third volume, we have just considered the ten commandments, and thus we go from there to the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

First, we should note that It is given us in both Matthew and Luke:

Matthew 6:9-13: After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Luke 11:2-4: And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

I have noted elsewhere that the prayer as given in Matthew 6 is part of the larger context of Christ's Sermon on the Mount.¹ In this section, Christ is addressing three expressions of the spiritual life as known in Judaism:

works of mercy (vv. 1-4), prayer (vv. 5-15), and fasting (vv. 16-18). First, he mentions charitable deeds ('almsgiving'), but in this case, He is pointing out how it can be done from the wrong motive (to be seen of men).² This sets up a parallel warning against the wrong kind of prayer, namely that God's people will not be heard for their visibility to others in prayer (v. 5) nor for their repetitions (v. 7). Rather, they will be heard for being in touch with the true God. (We will not address fasting here since we have already done so under the section on the First Commandment.)

The prayer that He then goes on to teach essentially has two sections – or we might say, two dimensions: first, that of God and the realm of eternity (heaven), and secondly, that of man and the present age (earth). First then, Matthew 6:9-10 deals with God Himself. God is first here, as He is first in the creation account, and first in the Ten Commandments. That is always the right order for life: realize that God is first, and after that, all the rest will work out. We see this in Matthew 6:33: 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' So we seek Him, we honor Him, we acknowledge His holiness, and then, as instructed, we pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.'

Some have suggested that the Lord's Prayer presents us not so much with a sequence (God then man) but a unity with Christ as the center. Since Jesus is the '*epiousion arton*', the 'The Living Bread, who came down from Heaven to bring life to this world,' it is He who unites in His person heaven and earth, God and man, eternity and the present moment. Dualism is broken apart. What happens in our little lives as we pray echoes throughout eternity as we pray in Christ, the God-man.

God is first

The One who is first in this prayer (as in Creation and the Ten Commandments) is 'Our Father which art in heaven' (Matt. 6:9). God has always existed as a Trinity of Persons within His own ineffable life, always to be acknowledged as '*hallowed*' – holy. The Father has always had a Son, who therefore (to use our time words) is as old as His Father. Furthermore, as we have seen, there has always been communication (or speech) within the Godhead, for the Son is denominated 'the Word' (John 1:1: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.') Through this eternal Son, all things were created (John 1:3). And

even after the Son enters the created order upon His incarnation, John 1:18 says that He is still ‘in the bosom of the Father.’ Because of His Godness, which involves omnipresence, somehow He is both with us and also in the bosom of the Father. That is why, when He works, the Father works (cf. John 5:17).

Within this Godhead is the Holy Spirit, fully God, and yet a distinct person, along with the Father and the Son. He descends upon the Son at His baptism (John 1:32), and the Son has the authority to baptize with the Spirit (John 1:33). Indeed, when Christ ascends back to the Father upon completing His atoning work, the Spirit comes down to replace Him (see John chapters 14 and 16). The redemptive work of Jesus Christ has caused us to be in Him, even as He is in the Father (John 17:21). So we go to Him in prayer, to ask that, through the Spirit, ‘thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.’

In a truly amazing sense, when we believers are praying, the risen Christ is praying: that is our prayers go up through Him all the way to the Father in heaven. In his book, *The Theology of Prayer*, the nineteenth-century New Orleans pastor, B. M. Palmer, said in various places that our far-from-perfect prayers are amazingly taken up through the wounded hands and feet of the glorified Jesus Christ, and made spotless and beautifully acceptable to the Father. Because of that, in spite of our imperfections, these prayers that go through the Lord Jesus will prevail. And furthermore, he suggests that the Holy Spirit within us re-echoes the intercessions of Christ from heaven.

That is something the evil one will work extremely hard to keep you from knowing! That is why Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19: ‘That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.’

We must never forget to keep in the back of our minds, that when we pray as Christians, at the very same time, Christ is praying. Here is why: 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, and Romans 6:3-5 says that we have been baptized into union with Christ both in His death and in His resurrection. John 15:1-18

tells us that we abide in Christ as a branch abides in the vine. The vital sap comes up into the branch from deep within the vine, and thus we bear the fruit of prayers – all because of our union with Him.

Yet we have a significant role to play in this. Jesus says in John 15:7: ‘If ... my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.’ Charles Spurgeon said: ‘Every promise of Scripture is a writing of God, which may be pleaded before Him with this reasonable request, “Do as thou has said!”’

In this Lord’s prayer, the promises of scripture are summarized into three parts:

- (1) Give us this day our daily bread.
- (2) Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
- (3) Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. In other words: provision, pardon, and protection.

Provision

We are in no sense precluded from praying for bread and other physical needs. Jesus teaches us to do it here. It is a sign of spiritual maturity to realize that everything we need ultimately comes from God. Psalm 37:25 tells us: ‘I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.’ Material concerns are mentioned in 3 John 2 as a matter of legitimate prayer: ‘Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.’ We notice here that Jesus teaches us to pray, not for my daily bread, but for our daily bread. Even as we pray for our own needs, our eyes are always on others. This reflects who Christ is, and who He would have us to be.

Pardon

The Lord teaches us to pray for forgiveness, and reminds us to forgive others who have offended us. He says in Matthew 6:14-15: ‘For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’ A certain honesty and humility is required when we ask God for forgiveness. And that open spirit makes us realize that as others have offended us, we also have offended God. Therefore, if we are seeking His pardon, we must immediately extend pardon to those who have done us

wrong. Then the channel between God and us is unblocked, so that we can work as instruments of reconciliation:

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

If we refuse to forgive others, then we lack divine pardon, and are hinderances to renewed fellowship, rather than agents of reconciliation. Lack of forgiveness in a church strips the congregation of much of its power for spiritual blessing. Often, the need is not new, up-to-date programs, but simple forgiveness among the people! Word will inevitably get out, and it will draw other needy souls in to the church.

I remember an elderly minister in the Baptist tradition, who years ago held a revival meeting at a church in the deep South. He became very nervous when he found out that the well-known evangelist, Oral Roberts, was speaking at such a meeting in the same town. His fears that no one would attend were confirmed on the opening two nights when few attended and for those who came there seemed no spiritual power. On the third night, the pastor asked those who were in need of forgiveness to come to the front of the church, kneel down at the rail and pray. This would become the source of incredible spiritual blessing as soon as it was put into practice not only by the congregants but by the session and pastor himself.

When a red-headed deacon came and knelt down at the front, the minister remarked to the visiting evangelist: 'I hate him, for he has done nothing but cause me trouble.' Seeing his anger and hatred, the evangelist directed him to go down and kneel beside the offending deacon, and put his arm around him. That is to say, he called him to forgive and reconcile with his brother. Seeing the pastor's resistance, however, he further said that if he did not begin the process of reconciliation, he would leave the meeting and tell the people why.

The minister did so, albeit begrudgingly. When he went and knelt down by the man, embracing him, this red-headed deacon broke down into tears. They spoke, confessed and forgave. The result was amazing. Despite a nationally-known evangelist holding a meeting within miles of them, the

next night their sanctuary was flooded with people. The spiritual hindrances to blessing had been removed as the church themselves had taken up the ministry of reconciliation.

Protection

Jesus says for us to pray: ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ The famous Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, said that this means that we are to ask the Lord to keep us from getting into situations of temptation which would be too hard for us to resist.³ James 4:7 says: ‘Resist the devil and he will flee from you.’ One of the chief ways we resist him is by praying ahead of time that we be kept out of situations that we cannot overcome. And we can pray that for others (for it says ‘Lead *us* not into temptation ...’). One of the ways Simon Peter came back from more than one fall was that Jesus had prayed for him specifically: ‘And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren’ (Luke 22:31-32). Our great encouragement is that ‘[Christ] ever liveth to make intercession for us’ (Heb. 7:25).

An Unseen Spiritual Battle

Daniel 10 shows us an unseen spiritual battle, taking place ‘in the heavenlies’ that we cannot see. It takes place in the context of Daniel’s prayer for captive Israel to be able to go back home after seventy years in Babylon, for he had understood from the book of Jeremiah that those years were now accomplished (Dan. 9:2 and Jer. 25:11-12). The spiritual depth of Daniel is shown in how he immediately began interceding for Israel to return; that is, he is asking the Lord to do exactly what He had said He would do. That put him on the most solid praying ground! As John Calvin said: ‘There is nothing that we are promised to expect from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayer. It is absolutely true that it is by prayer that we dig up the treasures that were poured out by the Gospel of our Lord, and which our faith has gazed upon longingly.’⁴

So Daniel prayed out the treasures of God’s promises in Jeremiah 25, but it took some serious struggle to get there. I suspect that there are prayers that require little or no struggle, but most of them call for arduous self-denial and personally-costly labor. In that mode, Daniel fasted for three

weeks (Dan. 10:2-3). His vision of a holy angel literally knocked him to the ground (Dan. 10:9), but the angel lifted him up (v. 10). Then is revealed to us what was going on in unseen places during the three weeks of Daniel's prolonged fast. The angel had sought to get through with the requested blessing for Israel's return, but he was strongly resisted by a demonic presence whose territory was the kingdom of Persia. The evil angel did not want to let the holy angel through, for he had a major blessing of home-going for the Jews. To use the modern expression, the devil's angel 'gave it all he had'.

So, all unseen by human eyes below (even of the faithful), an intense spiritual battle is raging above between God's angel and the devil's angel. During much of this struggle, it seemed that the holy angel and the demon prince were more or less evenly matched. This is where the prayers of Daniel, a human being on earth (saint though he was), come in to redress the balance in this all-important battle.

It is of first-rate importance for us to recognize this: the prayers of a human believer on earth had such effects that they changed the tide of a battle between spiritual entities above! The twenty-one days of hard praying of Daniel brought in another mighty angel to help – it was the archangel Michael (Dan. 10:12-13). The two strong angels together overcame the demonic angel of Persia, who was trying to block the blessing for Israel. The prayers of Daniel were used to bring the archangel onto the scene to aid in the battle against the 'prince of the kingdom of Persia' (Dan. 10:12-13). His 'mourning three full weeks' in fasting and prayer were used in the plan of God to usher in the blessing to Israel. And though it would still require more time and struggle, it was as if the great spiritual work had been done that would accomplish the promise.

We are never told exactly why the saints often have to persevere in prayer for the already destined help to arrive. Our place is not to understand why, but patiently to remain faithful in praying. This means that prayers on earth affect struggles going on in the heavenly places, which heavenly places determine what shall happen to God's cause on earth. Our place is always to persevere, never to give up.

That is the teaching of Jesus in Luke 11: 5-10:

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a

friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that asketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened ...

Notice here that the friendship was not sufficient to get the bread. It took perseverance in asking for the blessing to come. Our prayers are like that. Everything is of course based on the infinite friendship of Christ to us. But something more is required to have specific prayers answered. It is perseverance.

The love of God to us is beyond anything we can ever measure; it is never in question. The precise reasons for perseverance in prayer to a God who is infinitely loving and generous are not really revealed to us, as far as I can tell. But in light of what we just saw in Daniel's experience, it may be that there are certain Satanic hinderances that need to be taken care of in the upper realm by our prayers from here below. Apparently, Satan can hinder our prayers, but cannot stop them if we persevere.

Andrew Murray says that the power of believing prayer is simply irresistible (in his *With Christ in the School of Prayer*): 'Real faith can never be disappointed. It knows how, just as water, to exercise the irresistible power it can have. Water must be gathered up and accumulated, and the stream can come down in full force, there must often be a heaping up of prayer, until God sees that the measure is full, and the answer will come Man in his spiritual nature too, is under the law of gradual growth that reigns in all created life. It is only in the path of development that he can reach his future destiny. And it is the Father, in whose hands are the times and seasons who alone knows the moment when the soul or the church is ripened to that fullness of faith in which it can really take and keep the blessing.'⁵

As we draw to a close our study of the Holy Spirit and the Christian life, it is most appropriate that we address the subject of persevering prayer in this last chapter but one. In prayer, we are face to face with Christ, the One

who commanded long ago through David: '[When thou saidst], Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LoRd, will I seek' (Ps. 27:8). If it takes burdens of life and aspirations to see fulfilled holy promises in the Word to keep us seeking His face, so much the better. Seeing Him means being progressively transformed into His image, and that is the goal of our lives: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord' (2 Cor. 3:18).

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1. I make use throughout this last section of some of the things I wrote in *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?* (Christian Focus Publications: Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, 1989).
 2. Would the current term be 'virtue-signaling?'
 3. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. I* (Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention: Nashville, 1930).
 4. Calvin, *Institutes* III. XX. 2.
 5. Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, NJ, 1972), pp. 87-89.

CHAPTER 16

HONORING THE HOLY SPIRIT

We are to honor the Holy Spirit, by not grieving Him, by not quenching Him, and by walking in Him. True believers will never blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

We may honor the Holy Spirit by obeying two negative injunctions of the New Testament, and by following a positive one. Negatively, we are (1) to grieve not the Spirit; and (2) to quench not the Spirit. Positively, (3) we are to walk in the Spirit. As we do this, we will not blaspheme Him.

First, we are told in Ephesians 4:30 to ‘grieve not the Spirit’.

The Greek verb here is *lupeite*, and it is close to Isaiah 63:9-10. After recalling how faithfully and patiently God had been with His people, sharing their afflictions, he says in verse 10: ‘But they rebelled , and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.’ As Frank Thielman points out: ‘The LXX has *paroxyno*... a word whose semantic range more accurately matches the underlying Hebrew term *azab* (rebuke, be worried, grieve, hurt someone’s feelings ...) Paul’s word choice hints that he had the Isaiah passage in mind, perhaps in Hebrew, as he dictated these words ...’¹

This injunction not to grieve the Spirit shows that He is a person (as the New Testament at length shows, He is one of the three members of the Godhead), and as a true person has the capacity to be hurt or grieved. While we rightly think of God as infinitely serene and, therefore, beyond all the range of being injured by mere humans, yet at the same time, Scripture shows us that the infinite and blessed Spirit can be hurt: especially by those whom He has sealed to the day of final redemption. This is not a weakness on His part, but a strength, in virtue of which He is personally inside those whom He has regenerated and sealed, and is hence very concerned with their attitude and actions. It is not that He is helplessly subject to them, but rather He has chosen to live in such closeness to them, that He actually feels what they do, including sinful choices. He is able to work from there to get

them to the place for which He has finally sealed them. But He must go by way of their feelings and doings, and that is at some cost to Himself, although the Almighty One never fails to accomplish His good purpose with those who are weak and erring.

In this immediate context, Paul discusses our use of the tongue, showing that by wrong words we may grieve the Spirit. The use of grievous words is specified in Ephesians 4:31: 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.' As Thielman notes: 'All five words in his list, including "bitterness" (*pikria* ...), can refer to verbal abuse, and the admonition to avoid foul communication in the immediate context implies that verbally expressed anger is Paul's primary concern.'² Paul goes on in this verse to say: 'Together with all malice.' The Greek word for malice is *kakia*, and it 'is a mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition ...'³ Paul says that all of this must 'be put away from you, together with all malice' (v. 31).

In other words, carrying a mean spirit and using angry words are a grief to the Holy Spirit, who is the kindness and patience of God. They are inconsistent with His presence, and have to be 'put away' for Him to maintain proper control. The next verse shows us what is to replace a bitter attitude and angry speech: 'And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you' (v. 32). We are called here to be like the God who saved us and inhabits us. He forgives us for Christ's sake, and thus we are to forgive. That way, we are 'followers of God as dear children'. We are able to do this, for, according to Ephesians 2:6-7, God will 'show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus'. The very One who dealt with us in such kindness will enable us, in resurrection union with His Son, to show kindness to others. Jonathan Edwards captured the right attitude here: 'If love be in exercise, it will tend to keep down the irascible passions, and hold them in subjection, so that reason and the spirit of love may regulate them and keep them from being immoderate in degree, or of long continuance.'⁴

That is an attitude, that instead of grieving the Spirit, pleases Him. In particular, we are to bear in mind that 'the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance' (Rom. 2:4). Because of 'the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering ...,' His kindness broke our hearts, and we came to His feet in repentance. God wishes that kindly, forbearing attitude

to characterize our dealings with other sinners, so that they too can be deeply touched. Anger will generally put them off, but kindness can draw them to the God who has been so kind to us. In a word, it is the movement of the love of God to us and then through us.

Alexander Elchaninov has put his finger on the underlying attitude that helps keep us from harshness: 'In all life, including the Christian life, wisdom consists in this: not to be exacting towards people.'⁵

Second, we are not to quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

At times the Spirit is likened to fire, as in Matthew 3:11; Luke 12:49, and Acts 2:3-4. The imagery here is of someone pouring a bucket of water on a burning fire, in order to extinguish it. We are strictly instructed *not* to do this with the person of the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit is an infinite Person, and we are finite persons, we are not to think of this quenching in any mechanical way (as in literally putting out fires in our own world). Rather we must think of it in personal terms. We are not to attempt to hold down, or get rid of, His influence in ourselves or in people around us, especially in cases where His strong working makes us feel uncomfortable.

This can be done in various ways. Denney lists a few of them: 'Cold looks, contemptuous words, silence, studied disregard, go a long way to quench it. So does unsympathetic criticism.'⁶ Particularly has this been an issue in the great revivals that have followed the sixteenth-century Reformation, not least that of the First Great Awakening of the 1740s, the Second Great Awakening from the 1780s to the 1830s, and the Evangelical Revival that occurred in both Britain and America in 1858/59. The most judicious observers (often workers in the revivals themselves) have openly admitted that many excesses occurred against the good order of Christian worship (such as rolling on the ground, jerking of the body, and barking like dogs). The Christian leaders who criticized such practices were not necessarily out of line, and were not against the Holy Spirit, for the most part. Jonathan Edwards meticulously and fairly worked through many cases of both sound and spurious results of revival in a series he preached in 1738, soon published as *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions*. One must add here that when the Holy Spirit is working, it is nothing unusual for the evil one to seek to push things to the extreme, in order to undercut the good effects of the divine work in people's souls.

In sum, Jesus said: ‘By their fruits shall ye know them’ (Matt. 7:20), and the best we can do with claims to high spiritual experiences is to seek to examine what their lives are like after these experiences. We cannot be certain about people’s inner experiences, but we can be certain that genuine spirituality will always be in accordance with the written Word that the Holy Spirit inspired. One of the crucial components of true spirituality is always humility, with a focus on God and others, rather than being taken up with the self-life. As Paul enjoins us: ‘... in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves’ (Phil. 2:3).

Third, we are to walk in the Spirit.

Instead of grieving or quenching the Spirit, we are to welcome Him gladly, and do all we can to make ourselves available to Him. Galatians 5 contrasts a life led by the Spirit with one motivated by the lusts of the flesh. When we walk in the Spirit, we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). To walk in the Spirit means that we live in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). To live in the Spirit means that He reproduces in us the characteristics of Christ, such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance ... (Gal. 5:22,23). This kind of life has no room for *the works of the flesh*, such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings (Gal. 5:19-21).

Galatians 5:24 shows that a deep attitude of self-crucifixion lies at the heart of a Christ-like life: ‘And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.’ Verse 26 indicates that pride (vain glory) and envy (a desire to pull others down) demonstrate that ‘the works of the flesh’ dominate us, rather than the Holy Spirit. But on the contrary, the true law of God is fulfilled in love to others (Gal. 5:14). It begets bearing others burdens (Gal. 6:2), dealing tenderly with other believers who have sinned (Gal. 6:1), and unwearied well-doing (Gal. 6:9, 10). Such a life is a gift of God’s grace, a byproduct of our co-resurrection with Christ (Eph. 2:5-8). We were saved by God with this kind of life in view (Eph. 4:10). Our willingly taking our part in crucifixion of the self-life (or, in the words of Romans 6, mortification) is always followed by something wonderful: sharing in Christ’s resurrection in a life of good works (Eph. 2:10). Living

under the promptings of the Holy Spirit means that in some real sense, we are already sharing the Throne of Christ above (Eph. 2:6).

That sharing, of course, is in a way that is appropriate for humans, who are still being sanctified and, therefore, are not yet glorified. Yet, for all our imperfection, we do make progress in the good works to which God has ordained us (Eph. 2:10). A life such as this is described as *a holy temple in the Lord* (Eph. 2:21), and *an habitation of God through the Spirit* (Eph. 2:22).

An ontological reality – a vital connection with God in the Spirit – is what makes real the beautiful fruit that is produced through the believer. It brings forth what Paul describes as ‘all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love ... keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:2, 3). It comes from the infinite kindness with which God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32). It is, as we saw, ontological, for in forgiving us, God made us His *dear children* (Eph. 4:30–5:1). We now live as part of His family. Being in that divine family precludes the works of the flesh, replacing them with kindness (Eph. 4:32) and thanksgiving (Eph. 5:4). This means that we have been brought out of darkness, and have been made *light in the Lord* (Eph. 5:8). It is in fact, the resurrection life (Eph. 5:14); that is, resurrection in the spirit, although not yet in the body. That will come later on the last day.

Paul then goes on to specify this walking in the Spirit as involving avoidance of excess of alcohol (Eph. 5:18), hearts full of singing to the Lord (v. 19), thankfulness (v. 20), mutual submission (v. 21), submission of wives to husbands in the Lord (v. 22), love of husbands to wives (vv. 24, 25), as Christ loved the church (v. 24). In a word, it requires willing obedience to the written will of God for His people, and that willingness is given us in the new birth (cf. Jer. 31:33-34), and made plain in the inspired Scriptures. The cry of the Psalmist is characteristic of every true believer: ‘*O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day*’ (Ps. 119:97). Father Elchaninov writes: ‘To turn our gaze on the image of heavenly beauty – this is the best means of freeing ourselves from the captivity of hell and of resisting its suggestions.’⁷

The Leading of the Good Shepherd

Perhaps the most beloved portion of Scripture is Psalm 23: 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' While the voice of the divine Shepherd comes through the written Word, His inner presence within the believer illumines the soul to make sense of the written will of God. But He also does more. In the complexities of everyday life, the Spirit quietly and firmly prompts Christians in particular directions, so that when they come to a crossroad, they sense from within which way to go.

This inner prompting must not be written off, as though it were a potentially dangerous way to slip in new revelations. Certainly with the close of the canon of the New Testament, revelation was long ago completed. But this has never meant within true Christianity the absence of the Good Shepherd. His hand is always directly over the minds and consciences of His people who are still in this difficult world. He is always prompting, leading, pushing, and, at times, blocking certain paths for them, both providentially and also from their inner understandings.

It is philosophical and religious Deism that axiomatically excludes the Holy Spirit from the believer's consciousness and will, not biblical Christianity. But Deism definitely has affected much of the apologetic approaches of large segments of the Western Churches, so that since the eighteenth century, many of them are fearful of criticism by the elite culture for teaching the biblical truth that the Good Shepherd has His ways (past our human understanding) of letting His people know precisely what they should do next. This specific guidance can cover personal relationships, business decisions, and political elections, and much else. What should be the hope and joy of the Church – God's taking us by the hand down the road of life – seems to be an embarrassment to many churches, for fear of offending the Deistic culture.

But we would do well to follow the directions of an old hymn ('Our best, our all'):

Wait not for men to laud; heed not their slight,
Winning the smile of God, brings its delight ...

This should be the norm of the Christian life, but it is sadly possible for once religious people to run in the opposite direction; that is, in extreme contradiction of honoring the Holy Spirit, some have gone even further than

Deism and have actually blasphemed Him. We must examine this grim reality, for Christ spoke of it.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

The only sin that is unforgivable is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It is mentioned (1) in Matthew 12:30-32 and (2) in Mark 3:28, 29.

(1) Matthew 12:31-32: 'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.'

The main context for this hard saying is found immediately before this passage, when Jesus cast a demon out of a man who was blind and dumb (Matt. 12:22). The Pharisees sought to discount His miracle of merciful deliverance by attributing it to the devil: 'But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils' (Matt. 12:24). They were so concerned to discredit Jesus, that they discredited the Holy Spirit by whom He worked this miracle. That put them into a position of having denied the Holy Ghost, and that was an unpardonable sin. The pure and totally holy Spirit of God had by them been compared to a devil, and thereby, total condemnation awaited them. Jesus is the only One who can forgive our sins, and to blacken His work as being demonic puts one past the humble and contrite spirit that seeks forgiveness.

Some true Christians may at times harbor hard thoughts towards God, but this is not the same thing. Such sinful thoughts will be repented of by those whose hearts are truly contrite. This particular sin means that one continues to get rid of unpleasant thoughts about God by ascribing the sense of sin to the devil himself; thus putting Christ and His Spirit into the category of demonic. Such people will not face the truth about themselves, that they have offended the infinite majesty of the Holy God. Thus, they will not seek forgiveness for it, and will therefore not be forgiven. In order to protect their fallen selves, and to remain as they are, they will claim that their bad feelings are the fault of God Himself, or according to their feelings, the fault of the devil.

Jesus shows that this is impossible, for Satan would not work against himself, which is what he would be doing if he cast out his own imps by the power of Jesus. According to Jesus, when the kingdom of God comes, one of its signs will be the casting out of devils (Matt. 12:28). The Lord of all has power over even the emissaries of Satan, and is thus able to cast them out.

A true Christian has been humbled before the Lord of all, and will come to see that Christ has the power to defeat evil – even in themselves. They have been gathered out of the vile prison of the devil and now reject his authority over them (Matt. 12:29). They therefore follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, who exalts Jesus and condemns Satan.

(2) It is the same in Mark 3:28-30: ‘Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.’

We see here that leaders in Israel so resisted Jesus that they ascribed to Him being under the control of an evil spirit. In other words, they resisted Him to the point of claiming that His ministry was from the devil. To persist in such an opinion leaves one in the category of never receiving eternal pardon, for the only One who could pardon them is despised as evil, and the Spirit by which He works is utterly disdained.

It is important, for pastoral purposes, to make clear that all kinds of sins against God can be forgiven, except for one. One suspects that the devil himself is hard at work here, to make weak souls feel that they have committed this unpardonable sin. But it is, I think, relatively rare. True believers may have some horrible thoughts, but in most cases they will think better of it, and will repent. This particular sin means that one refuses to recognize it as sin, and thus never repents. It is the opposite of a ‘broken and a contrite heart’, which will be found in all true believers at every stage of their journey. True Christians will be sensitive to sin within themselves, and will come to the fount of forgiveness, whenever needed. But those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will not heed His tender warnings, and will carry on in their proud way, putting themselves past forgiveness. Those who for some reason are fearful that they may have committed this sin have actually not done so. Those who do commit it think that anyone and everyone (God included) is to blame, but themselves. Hence they fondly think that they

have nothing to confess. This puts them outside the circle of pardon. But many a frail soul fears it, and their fear of having offended God is a sign that they have not done so.

* * * * *

This concludes the third volume of this series of **Systematic Theology**. It is normal to have a concluding section on **Eschatology**, but I will refer the interested reader to my *Revelation: A Mentor Expository Commentary*, where most of the issues are addressed in an exegetical manner.¹

1. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010), p. 318.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 319.

4. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), pp. 196, 197.

5. Alexander Elchaninov, *The Diary of A Russian Priest* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press: Crestwood, New York, 1967), p. 163.

6. James Denney, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: The Expositor's Bible* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p. 236.

7. Elchaninov, op. cit., p. 31.

1. Douglas F. Kelly, *Revelation: A Mentor Expository Commentary* (Christian Focus Publications, 2020)

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SCRIPTURE INDEX

Genesis

1:1 [30](#)
1:2 [17](#), [50](#), [73](#)
1:3 [255](#), [277](#), [335](#)
1:4 [277](#)
1:26-28 [328](#)
1:27 [23](#)
1:27-28 [18](#), [249](#)
1:28 [23](#), [317](#)
1:31 [296](#)
2:3 [159](#), [296](#)
2:7 [132](#)
2:15 [249](#), [301](#)
2:16-17 [249](#)
2:18-25 [302](#), [317](#)
2:20 [302](#)
2:23-24 [250](#)
2:24 [259](#), [320](#)
2:25 [318](#)
3 [57](#), [235](#)
3:4, 5 [57](#)
3:6 [317](#)

3:8 [18](#), [153](#)
3:8-13 [336](#)
3:15 [77](#), [146](#), [175](#)
3:16 [302](#)
3:17-19 [302](#)
3:18 [302](#)
3:19 [132](#)
4:2-4 [302](#)
4:5-8 [314](#)
4:20 [302](#)
4:21 [302](#)
4:22 [302](#)
4:23 [319](#)
4:25 [235](#)
6:2 [234](#)
6:3 [31](#), [39](#)
6:5 [153](#)
6:5-13 [235](#)
6:8 [113](#), [153](#)
8:8-12 [54](#)
8:10, 12 [297](#)
9:20 [302](#)
10:1 [154](#), [235](#)
10:1-32 [72](#)
11 [154](#)
12:1-3 [188](#), [235](#)

12:2 [154](#)
12:5 [302](#)
13 [302](#)
14:16 [315](#)
14:18-20 [315](#)
15:1 [255](#)
15:6 [154](#), [156](#), [188](#)
17:1-2 [255](#)
17:1-8 [235](#)
17:4 [235](#)
17:7 [113](#), [227](#)
17:8 [302](#)
17:9-14 [78](#)
17:14 [313](#)
17:23-27 [227](#)
18:19 [235](#)
18:23-33 [302](#)
22:10-17 [76](#)
22:17, 18 [193](#), [235](#)
24:60 [194](#)
25:23 [239](#)
26:12 [302](#)
26:18-25 [302](#)
26:24 [255](#)
27:28 [302](#)
27:39 [302](#)

28-31 [302](#)
29:23 [297](#)
29:27 [297](#)
31:3 [255](#)
31:38-41 [303](#)
32:24-32 [303](#)
37:9-11 [76](#)
38:8 [320](#)
38:24 [324](#)
41:33, 38 [34](#)
41:39 [25](#)
48:3-4 [255](#)
50:10 [297](#)

Exodus

3 [159](#)
3:14 [233](#), [255](#), [277](#)
4:8-9 [76](#)
4:10-16 [37](#)
6:1-7:5 [255](#)
8:15 [243](#)
8:32 [243](#)
9:16 [243](#)
9:34 [243](#)
11:1-10 [229](#)
12:2 [229](#)

12:3-20 [297](#)
12:4-5 [229](#)
12:7, 13 [229](#)
12:15, 19 [313](#)
12:17, 24-25 [249](#)
13:10 [249](#)
15:26 [249](#)
16:22-30 [297](#)
17:1-6 [72](#)
17:1-17 [58](#)
18:4 [250](#)
18:13 [193](#)
19:5 [249](#)
19:5, 6 [177](#), [227](#)
19:5-25 [177](#)
19:6 [23](#)
19:7 [193](#)
20:1-3 [286](#)
20:1-26 [255](#)
20:4-6 [290](#)
20:7 [294](#)
20:8-11 [296](#)
20:12 [307](#)
20:13 [312](#)
20:14 [317](#)
20:15 [328](#)

20:16 [330, 334](#)
20:17 [337](#)
21:12 [313](#)
21:22-25 [314](#)
21:23-25 [313](#)
23:1-7 [336](#)
23:14 [292](#)
23:16 [69, 72](#)
23:20 [289](#)
23:20-33 [289](#)
24:1, 2 [193](#)
25:8, 9 [292](#)
28:1 [226](#)
28:3 [39](#)
29:4 [226](#)
30:17-21 [226](#)
31:1-11 [35](#)
31:3 [35](#)
31:14 [313](#)
31:31-35 [39](#)
34:6 [113](#)
34:22 [69](#)
35:30-35 [35](#)
40:34 [203](#)
40:34-35 [48](#)
40:34-38 [24](#)

Leviticus

3:2 [21](#)

4:1-12 [36n](#)

4:15 [193](#)

5:14-16 [333](#)

7:20 [313](#)

8:6 [226](#)

11:32 [224](#)

11:44 [336](#)

11:44-45 [159](#)

14:6, 51 [224](#)

14:16 [224](#)

16:12, 13 [21](#)

17:7-9 [313](#)

18:4 [236](#)

18:8 [322](#)

18:18 [319](#)

18:22 [321](#)

19:4 [290](#)

19:15, 16 [336](#)

19:16 [336](#)

19:32 [307](#)

20:13 [321](#)

20:26 [236](#)

23:15, 16 [69](#)

23:17 [69](#)

23:44 [21](#)
24:10-16 [294](#)
24:17-21 [313](#)
26 [236](#)
26:1, 2 [290](#)

Numbers

3:7-8 [249](#)
4:23, 30, 37, 41, 47 [249](#)
5:5-10 [333](#)
6:23-27 [21](#)
8:6-7 [226](#)
8:11, 15, 19, 22 [249](#)
9:12 [230](#)
11:16, 17 [193](#)
11:17, 25 [39](#)
11:25 [34](#)
11:25, 29 [39](#)
11:29 [37](#)
13:23 [133](#)
15:37-41 [189](#)
20:1-13 [58](#)
24:2-3 [39](#)
28:26 [69](#)
29:12-38 [72](#)
35 [178](#)

35:30 [313](#)

Deuteronomy

1:10 [76](#)

1:13 [25](#)

2:30 [243](#)

4:6 [25](#), [53](#)

4:10 [177](#)

4:20 [286](#)

4:37 [236](#)

4:40 [308](#)

5:8-10 [290](#)

5:11 [294](#)

5:12-15 [296](#)

5:16 [307](#)

5:17 [312](#)

5:18 [317](#)

5:19 [328](#)

5:21 [337](#)

6:1-3 [287](#)

6:4-7 [287](#)

6:4-9 [189](#)

6:5 [287](#)

6:13 [57](#), [59](#), [259](#)

6:16 [57](#), [58](#)

7:6 [227](#), [236](#)

7:6-10 [188](#)
7:7-8 [236](#)
8:2 [58](#)
8:3 [57](#), [58](#)
8:3, 4 [259](#)
8:8 [133](#)
9:4-6 [236](#)
9:10 [177](#)
10:4 [177](#)
10:22 [76](#)
13 [313](#)
14:2 [227](#)
16:10 [69](#)
16:18-20 [309](#)
17:6 [313](#)
18:15, 18, 19 [20](#)
18:15-19 [178](#)
18:16 [177](#)
18:20-22 [256](#)
19:15 [313](#)
19:16-20 [334](#)
19:21 [313](#)
22:5 [319](#)
22:30 [322](#)
23:2 [191](#)
23:16 [234](#)

25:4 [284](#)
27-28 [236](#)
27:15 [290](#)
27:20 [322](#)
29:29 [243](#), [246](#)
30:6 [36](#)
30:19 [234](#)
32:4 [139](#)
32:7 [25](#)
32:10 [26](#)
32:11 [30](#), [50](#)
32:29-30 [26](#)
33:7, [26](#), 29 [250](#)
64:9 [189](#)

Joshua

3:15 [224](#)
9:19, 20 [295](#)
10:13 [295](#)
11:20 [243](#)

Judges

2:1-5 [255](#)
2:16 [22](#)
3:10 [32](#), [39](#)
5:19-20 [76](#)
6:34 [39](#)

7-8 [252](#)
11:29 [39](#)
12:29 [32](#)
13:24,25 [32](#)
13:25 [39](#)
14:6 [32](#), [39](#)
15:14 [39](#)
21:16 [193](#)

1 Samuel

2:25 [243](#)
3:1-18 [255](#)
3:9 [14](#)
3:19 [256](#)
8 [22](#)
8:4 [22](#)
10:6, 9 [39](#)
10:8-10 [22](#)
11:6 [39](#)
12:12-15 [22](#)
12:24-25 [22](#)
13:8-14 [22](#)
15:6-9 [22](#)
15:11, 22, 35 [22](#)
16:1-5 [22](#)
16:12-13 [39](#)

16:13 [22](#), [39](#)

16:14 [22](#), [31](#)

17:6 [130](#)

17:40 [234](#)

19:19-24 [79](#)

28:7-25 [22](#)

28:18 [22](#)

2 Samuel

2:11 [22](#)

5:3 [22](#)

5:4 [22](#)

5:10 [22](#)

7 [236](#)

7:12-16 [178](#)

7:25 [22](#)

7:26 [22](#)

8:14 [22](#)

11 [22](#)

23:2 [35](#)

1 Kings

3:3 [23](#)

8:1-3 [193](#)

8:11 [203](#)

8:14, 22, 55, 65 [177](#)

8:33 [129](#)

12:16-19 [236](#)
12:23 [237](#)
12:26-33 [237](#)
13:34 [237](#)
14:16 [237](#)
15:30, 34 [237](#)
16:2, 19, 26, 31 [237](#)
17:1 [256](#)
17:1, 2 [96](#)
18:41-45 [256](#)
19:19-40 [256](#)
21:19 [256](#)
21:27 [130](#)
22:11 [256](#)
22:22 [256](#)
22:28 [256](#)
22:46 [324](#)

2 Kings

5:14 [224](#)
17:7-23 [237](#)
17:15-23 [237](#)
23:7 [324](#)

1 Chronicles

13:2, 4 [177](#)
28:11-12 [35](#)

2 Chronicles

5:13-14 [48](#)

6:3, 12, 13 [177](#)

7:1-4 [24](#)

7:3 [48](#)

7:8 [177](#)

10:16-19 [236](#)

11:13-14 [237](#)

23:7 [324](#)

28:12-19 [39](#)

30:18 [113](#)

36:14-21 [237](#)

Ezra

3:11 [113](#)

7:6 [191](#)

Nehemiah

8:1-9 [191](#)

9:1 [130](#)

9:1, 2 [130](#)

9:7 [235](#)

9:20 [37](#), [39](#)

Esther

4:16 [130](#)

Job

1:19 [31](#)
15:11-16 [91](#)
26:13 [33](#)
28:28 [53](#)
31:1 [321](#)
32:8 [39](#)
33:4 [33](#)
42:5 [143](#)

Psalms

1:2-3 [133](#)
2:7 [55](#), [227](#)
4:6 [147](#)
5:11 [218](#)
9:10 [218](#)
16:9-11 [77](#)
19:1-6 [252](#)
19:7-11 [252](#)
19:12-13 [253](#)
20:2 [250](#)
22:1 [260](#)
22:3 [98](#)
22:22 [218](#)
22:22, 25 [177](#)
23 [351](#)

23:3 [218](#)
25:1-5 [168](#)
25:11 [218](#)
27:4 [147](#)
27:8 [70](#), [345](#)
30:4 [159](#)
31:1 [59](#)
31:5 [260](#)
33:6 [33](#), [39](#)
33:12 [236](#)
33:20 [250](#)
35:8 [110](#)
36:9 [83](#)
37:25 [342](#)
40:8 [138](#)
43:3 [278](#)
51:2 [127](#)
51:4 [131](#)
51:6 [335](#)
51:10 [137](#)
51:10, 11 [36](#)
51:11 [26](#), [32](#)
51:11-12 [39](#)
62:1 [168](#)
72 [178](#)
73:25 [146](#)

75:1 [218](#)
76:1 [218](#)
80: 3, 7, 14, 19 [132](#)
82:6 [259](#), [309](#)
85 [132](#)
87:5 [180](#)
89:16, 24 [218](#)
89:19 [250](#)
89:20-37 [178](#)
95:1-10 [236](#)
104:30 [50](#)
105:33 [133](#)
106:1 [113](#)
110 [178](#)
110:1 [78](#)
110:3 [146](#), [161](#), [223](#), [238](#)
111:10 [53](#)
112:3 [329](#)
115:9-11 [250](#)
118:22, 23 [259](#)
119:55 [218](#)
119:89-96 [335](#)
119:97 [285](#), [351](#)
119:130 [278](#)
121:1-2 [250](#)
135 [236](#)

139:5-14 [236](#)
139:16 [240](#)
139:23 [335](#)
139:23, 24 [336](#)
143:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 [168](#)
143:10 [32](#)

Proverbs

1:7 [53](#)
1:7-9 [25](#)
1:27 [110](#)
10:22 [329](#)
13:11 [329](#)
14:12 [148](#)
16:4 [241](#)
16:31 [308](#)
20:27 [148](#)
22:1 [330](#)
25:1 [257](#)
30:7-9 [333](#)
31 [319](#)

Ecclesiastes

1:2 [110](#)
9:10 [304](#)
12:7 [33](#)

Song of Songs

5:1-3 [167](#)

Isaiah

1:1, 2 [60](#)

1:2 [131](#)

1:10-20 [236](#)

1:16 [127](#)

1:29 [234](#)

3:16 [255](#)

5:1 [179](#)

5:1-7 [236](#)

5:22, 23 [152](#)

6:3 [159](#), [203](#)

6:8 [255](#)

7:9 [140](#)

7:14 [24](#), [48](#)

8:1-2 [257](#)

8:1, 5, 11 [255](#)

9:1-7 [237](#)

9:6 [19](#), [24](#)

9:8 [255](#)

9:13-21 [237](#)

10:13 [255](#)

10:20 [237](#)

11:1-3 [53](#)

11:2 [34, 39](#)
12:3 [72](#)
13:9-10 [76](#)
18:4 [255](#)
21:4 [224](#)
21:16 [255](#)
22:11 [303](#)
22:15 [255](#)
22:18-19 [237](#)
23:13 [303](#)
28:16 [255](#)
30:1 [32](#)
30:8 [257](#)
30:15 [255](#)
31:4 [255](#)
32:1, 5 [39](#)
34:1-5 [76](#)
34:4 [133](#)
37:6 [255](#)
37:32 [177](#)
38:1 [255](#)
38:9-22 [257](#)
40:1 [255](#)
40:11 [179](#)
41:8, 9 [235](#)
41:8-14 [236](#)

42:1 [39](#), [55](#), [227](#)
42:1-4 [52](#)
42:5 [255](#)
43:1 [235](#)
43:20 [236](#)
44:2 [255](#)
44:3 [39](#)
45:23 [294](#)
48:16 [32](#)
48:16,17 [37](#), [39](#)
49:5-26 [255](#)
50 [255](#)
51 [255](#)
51:2 [235](#)
53:4, 5 [21](#)
53:6 [54](#)
55:1-13 [237](#)
55:11 [278](#)
55:11-13 [255](#)
56:1-2 [255](#)
58:5 [130](#)
58:5-7 [130](#)
59:19 [32](#)
59:21 [102](#), [142](#)
61:1 [32](#), [39](#), [255](#)
61:1, 2 [259](#)

61:1-3 [39](#)
61:1-11 [237](#)
63:7 [130](#)
63:9,10 [32](#), [347](#)
63:9-12 [39](#)
63:10 [39](#)
63:13,14 [34](#)
64:1 [24](#)
65:12-15 [237](#)
65:17-25 [237](#)

Jeremiah

1:2 [255](#)
1:2, 4, 7, 11, 13 [255](#)
2:1 [255](#)
2:5 [255](#)
2:13, 17, 19 [131](#)
2:20 [324](#)
3:6 [324](#)
3:22, 23 [131](#)
4:3 [255](#)
5:17 [133](#)
6:9 [255](#)
6:30 [237](#)
7:3, 20 [255](#)
7:29 [237](#)

9:15 [255](#)
9:15, 23 [255](#)
10:6 [218](#)
11:1 [255](#)
13:1, 9 [255](#)
13:3, 6, 8 [255](#)
14:1 [255](#)
14:10 [255](#)
15:1 [255](#)
16:1 [255](#)
16:10-13 [237](#)
16:14 [255](#)
16:14-21 [237](#)
17:5 [255](#)
18:1 [255](#)
19:1 [255](#)
21:1 [255](#)
21:1, 2 [255](#)
22:1, 3 [255](#)
24:4-7 [133](#)
24:8-10 [133](#)
24:8-13 [133](#)
25:11-12 [343](#)
25:15, 32 [255](#)
26:1 [255](#)
27:1 [255](#)

28:16 [255](#)
29:13 [223](#)
29:17 [133](#)
31 [237](#), [285-6](#)
31:11, 12 [223](#)
31:31-34 [18](#), [40](#), [45](#), [188](#), [280](#)
31:33 [137](#), [227](#), [237](#)
31:33-34 [67](#), [121](#), [122](#), [164](#), [351](#)
33:8 [127](#)
36:2 [256](#)
36:17 [303](#)
36:23 [256](#)
36:27-32 [256](#)
51:60 [303](#)

Lamentations

2:17 [237](#)

Ezekiel

1:1 [255](#)
1:20 [33](#)
2:9-10 [256](#)
3:1-3 [256](#)
8:1 [189](#)
8:11 [24](#)
9:3 [49](#)
10:4, 18 [49](#)

11:22-23 [49](#)
11:24 [32](#)
13 [236](#)
14:1 [189](#)
14:6 [132](#)
16 [236](#)
16:47-50 [322](#)
16:50 [322](#)
20:1-4, 27, 31 [189](#)
20:44 [218](#)
23:11, 29 [324](#)
33:11 [132](#)
33:30-32 [189](#)
34:11 [179](#)
34:20-31 [237](#)
36:25 [127](#)
36:25-27 [36](#), [188](#)
36:25-28 [18](#)
36:26 [126](#)
36:26-27 [39](#)
36:31 [143](#)
37: 1-5, 10 [26](#)
37:1-10 [33](#)
37:1-14 [124](#)
37:4-6 [132](#)
37:14 [33](#)

37:22, 26-27 [122](#)

37:24 [178](#)

37:26-28 [237](#)

39:29 [39](#)

42:16-20 [24](#)

Daniel

1:4, 17 [303](#)

2:49 [303](#)

4:23 [224](#)

5:10-12 [303](#)

5:21 [224](#)

6:3 [303](#)

9:2 [343](#)

9:3 [130](#)

10:2, 3 [344](#)

10:9 [344](#)

10:12-13 [344](#)

12:3 [234](#)

Hosea

1 [131](#)

1:2 [324](#)

1:10 [24](#)

2 [131](#)

2:9 [131](#)

2:12 [133](#)

2:19-23 [237](#)

2:20 [143](#)

3 [131](#)

3:1-4:4 [324](#)

3:5 [131](#)

4:4, 5 [135](#)

6:1-3 [237](#)

6:4, 6 [130](#)

6:6 [130](#)

9:3-6 [237](#)

9:10 [133](#)

10:12 [237](#)

11:1 [235](#)

11:5-6 [237](#)

11:8-11 [237](#)

13:5 [235](#)

14:1-9 [237](#)

Joel

1:12 [133](#)

2:12-17 [132](#)

2:13 [130](#)

2:16 [177](#)

2:21-32 [237](#)

2:28 [32](#)

2:28-29 [39](#)

2:28-32 [24](#), [74](#), [96](#)

2:32 [74](#), [177](#)

Amos

1:1 [255](#)

3:2 [235](#), [236](#)

4:2 [159](#)

4:9 [133](#)

5:11 [303](#)

5:18 [76](#)

7:14 [303](#)

9:14 [303](#)

Jonah

1:4 [31](#)

3:6, 8 [130](#)

Micah

2:5 [177](#)

3:8 [37](#), [39](#)

3:8-12 [32](#)

3:11 [236](#)

4:5 [218](#)

6:11 [152](#)

Habakkuk

1:1 [255](#)

1:13 [159](#)
2:4 [139](#)
2:18-20 [33](#)

Zephaniah

3:17 [51](#)

Haggai

1:14 [37](#)
2:5-6 [39](#)
2:6, 7 [72](#)
2:17 [237](#)

Zechariah

1:6 [32](#)
2 [255](#)
3 [255](#)
4:6 [38](#)
7:12 [32](#), [37](#)
9:9-10 [237](#)
12:1 [37](#)
12:10 [37](#), [39](#)
13:1 [127](#)
14:16 [72](#)

Malachi

1:2-3 [238](#)

2:2 [237](#)
3:16 [218](#), [257](#)
3:17 [234](#)
4:2-6 [237](#)

Matthew

1:18 [48](#)
1:18-25 [48](#)
1:23 [24](#)
3:2 [133](#)
3:5, 6 [53](#)
3:7-10 [96](#)
3:11 [137](#), [225](#), [349](#)
3:13 [53](#)
3:13-17 [24](#), [226](#)
3:14 [54](#), [137](#)
3:16 [54](#), [55](#), [226](#)
3:16-17 [49](#), [53](#)
3:17 [55](#), [227](#), [247](#)
4:1 [56](#)
4:2 [58](#)
4:4 [58](#)
4:4, 7, 10 [259](#)
4:7 [58](#)
4:8, 9 [59](#)
4:10-11 [59](#)

4:17 [133](#)
5:16 [203](#)
5:17 [138](#), [287](#)
5:17-19 [287](#)
5:20-28, 31-48 [288](#)
5:21, 22 [314](#)
5:23-25 [314](#)
5:37 [294](#)
5:39 [315](#)
5:39-40 [315](#)
5:43-44 [279](#)
5:43-48 [280](#)
5:48 [159](#)
6:1-4 [340](#)
6:5-15 [340](#)
6:9 [340](#)
6:9-10 [340](#)
6:9-13 [288](#), [339](#)
6:14-15 [134](#), [280](#), [342](#)
6:16-18 [340](#)
6:33 [340](#)
7:20 [349](#)
7:24-27 [124](#)
9:13 [130](#)
10:22 [172](#)
11:9-14 [96](#)

11:20-21 133
11:25 242
11:25, 26 245
11:27 83, 141
11:28-30 113
11:30 286
12:17-21 52
12:22 352
12:22-30 60
12:24 352
12:28 352
12:29 353
12:30-32 352
12:31-32 352
12:41 133
12:46 60
13:10-15 242
13:21 172
13:46 144
13:47-50 123
14:5 96
15:2 224
16:15-19 193
16:18 179
18:18, 19 195
16:19 79n, 194

17:1-9 [96](#)
18:7 [281](#)
18:15-20 [134](#)
18:18 [79n](#)
18:22 [280](#)
18:23-35 [281](#)
19:4 [260](#)
19:5 [320](#)
19:5-6 [250](#)
19:12 [317](#)
19:16 [337](#)
19:17 [113](#)
19:21 [337](#)
19:22 [337](#)
20:28 [234](#)
21:16 [259](#)
21:19 [133](#)
21:35-43 [179](#)
21:46 [96](#)
22:2-14 [123](#)
22:14 [123](#)
22:29 [259](#)
22:30 [177](#)
22:37 [287](#)
22:41-45 [178](#)
22:42 [60](#)

23:2, 6 [191](#)
24:29-34 [76](#)
25 [83](#)
25:15 [304](#)
25:31-46 [244](#)
25:34-36 [124](#)
25:41, 45-46 [172](#)
25:46 [244](#)
26:17 [229](#)
26:17-35 [229](#)
26:31 [259](#)
26:37 [337](#)
26:39 [147](#)
26:42 [138](#)
26:59 [192](#)
26:61 [293](#)
27:3 [136](#)
27:46 [260](#)
27:51 [127](#)
28 [88](#)
28:18 [183](#), [193](#)
28:19 [218](#), [276](#)
28:19, 20 [68](#)

Mark

1:4 [17](#)

1:9-11 [24](#), [226](#)
1:10 [55](#), [226](#)
1:12 [55](#), [57](#)
1:15 [133](#)
1:23, 24 [60](#)
1:32-34 [60](#)
3:11 [60](#)
3:12 [60](#)
3:22-29 [60](#)
3:23 [60](#)
3:28, 29 [352](#)
3:28-30 [353](#)
6:12-13 [133](#)
6:15 [96](#)
7:2-5 [224](#)
7:4 [224](#)
7:11 [312](#)
7:21, 22 [126](#), [322](#)
8:28 [96](#)
11:32 [96](#)
12:10, 11 [259](#)
12:24 [259](#)
12:30 [287](#)
12:35-37 [178](#)
12:36 [260](#)
14:12 [229](#)

14:12-31 [229](#)
14:27 [259](#)
14:49 [259](#)
14:55 [192](#)
15:38 [55](#), [127](#)
16:15 [209](#)
16:15, 16 [123](#)
16:17 [74](#)

Luke

1:2 [95](#), [262](#)
1:3 [127](#)
1:5, 13 [226](#)
1:10 [192](#)
1:32 [48](#)
1:34 [48](#)
1:35 [48](#)
2:3-21 [48](#)
2:34 [242](#)
2:40 [52](#)
2:41-49 [52](#)
2:46 [260](#)
2:47 [52](#)
3:7-9 [96](#)
3:14 [316](#)
3:21 [54](#), [55](#)

3:21-22 [24](#), [226](#)
3:22 [54](#), [226](#)
3:23 [226](#)
4:1 [55](#)
4:1-13 [59](#)
4:12 [58](#)
4:14 [59](#)
4:16-21 [60](#)
4:16-30 [259](#)
4:21 [259](#)
4:22 [60](#)
4:28-30 [60](#)
4:31-32 [60](#)
4:33 [60](#)
5 [79](#)
8:18 [123](#)
10:1-20 [195](#)
10:13 [133](#)
10:17 [60](#), [61](#)
10:18 [61](#)
10:20 [242](#)
10:21 [61](#)
10:27 [287](#)
11:2-4 [339](#)
11:5-10 [344-345](#)
11:28 [124](#)

11:32 [133](#)
11:38 [224](#), [225](#)
12:49 [349](#)
12:50 [77](#), [225](#), [227](#)
13:3, 5 [133](#)
13:6-9 [133](#)
13:7 [133](#)
13:8 [133](#)
13:9 [133](#)
13:12 [60](#)
14:26 [312](#)
15:1 [133](#)
15:7, 10 [134](#)
15:17 [143](#)
16:10 [304](#)
16:30 [134](#)
16:31 [134](#)
17:2 [134](#)
17:3-4 [134](#)
19:6 [334](#)
19:8-10 [334](#)
20:4 [93](#)
20:41-44 [178](#)
22:3 [77](#)
22:7 [229](#)
22:7-30 [229](#)

22:17-18 [229](#)
22:19, 20 [230](#)
22:31-32 [61](#), [343](#)
23:45 [60](#)
23:46 [260](#)
24:25 [139](#)
24:27 [260](#)
24:44 [264](#)
24:47 [134](#)

John

1:1 [141](#), [340](#)
1:1-3 [17](#)
1:1-14 [178](#)
1:3 [340](#)
1:4 [141](#), [277](#)
1:9 [83](#), [141](#)
1:12, 13 [128](#), [169](#)
1:13 [136](#)
1:14 [24](#), [183](#), [203](#), [293](#)
1:16 [183](#)
1:18 [162](#), [340](#)
1:21, 45 [178](#)
1:32 [226](#), [340](#)
1:33 [340](#)
2:16 [56](#)

2:19 [293](#)
2:19-21 [63](#)
2:19-22 [24](#), [293](#)
2:20-22 [49](#)
2:29 [128](#)
3:2 [77](#)
3:3 [127](#), [239](#)
3:3, 5 [18](#)
3:3-6 [188](#)
3:3-8 [127](#)
3:5 [219](#)
3:6 [127](#)
3:8 [128](#), [231](#), [262](#)
3:16 [19](#), [44](#), [84](#), [109](#)
3:17 [243](#)
3:18 [123](#)
3:22, 26 [218](#)
3:31 [127](#)
3:34 [53](#), [59](#)
4:1, 2 [218](#)
4:7 [128](#)
4:10 [19](#)
4:12 [83](#)
4:24 [51](#), [83](#)
4:34 [138](#)
5:1 [128](#)

5:16, 17, 18, 26 [49](#)
5:17 [82](#), [306](#), [340](#)
5:18 [128](#)
5:19-20, 30 [49](#)
5:26 [183](#)
5:39 [259](#)
6:14 [178](#)
6:28, 29 [303](#)
6:37 [174](#)
6:39-40 [174](#)
6:40 [174](#)
6:51 [19](#)
6:63 [127](#), [335](#)
6:68 [146](#)
7:37-39 [24](#), [25](#), [72](#), [73](#), [80](#)
8:12 [116](#), [278](#)
8:15 [127](#)
8:21, 24b [116](#)
8:24a [116](#)
8:31 [172](#)
8:31-32 [275](#)
9:2, 3 [164](#)
9:4 [303](#)
9:35-38 [273](#)
9:39 [242](#)
9:41 [164](#)

10:1-10 179
10:11-15 179
10:18 63
10:28 277
10:29 173
10:33 259
10:34 309
10:34-37 259
11:1-44 134
11:25 277
11:25-27 273
11:46-48, 53 134
12:37-40 242
12:42 191
12:46 279
13:18 259
13:35 279
14 341
14:1-4 273
14:2 207
14:6 83, 335
14:9 162
14:9-11, 20 49
14:15 285
14:16 44, 80
14:18 65, 80

14:23 [47](#), [83](#)
14:26 [44](#), [80](#), [195](#)
14:30 [56](#)
15:1-8 [193](#)
15:1-18 [341](#)
15:5 [274](#)
15:7 [341](#)
15:14 [275](#)
15:22 [164](#)
15:25 [166](#)
15:26 [80](#), [84](#)
15:26, 27 [91](#)
15:27 [95](#), [197](#), [262](#)
16 [341](#)
16:1 [191](#)
16:7 [69](#), [80](#)
16:7-16 [195](#)
16:12-15 [12](#), [27](#)
16:13 [48](#), [78](#)
16:13, 14 [82](#)
16:13-15 [44](#)
17:2 [277](#)
17:3 [109](#), [135](#), [254](#), [277](#)
17:4 [303](#)
17:6-26 [116](#)
17:7 [335](#)

17:9 [234](#)
17:12 [218, 259](#)
17:17 [223](#)
17:19 [117, 234](#)
17:20-21 [275](#)
17:21 [341](#)
17:22, 23 [273](#)
17:24 [174](#)
19:11 [127](#)
19:30 [230](#)
19:36 [230](#)
20:17 [80](#)
20:18 [80](#)
20:20-22 [24](#)
20:20-23 [134](#)
20:21 [297](#)
20:21, 22 [194, 195](#)
20:21-23 [79](#)
20:22 [47, 64, 83, 273](#)
20:22, 23 [194](#)
20:23 [194, 297](#)
21 [79](#)
32:8 [34](#)

Acts

1:1, 2 [196](#)

1:3 [80](#)
1:4 [71](#)
1:5 [225](#)
1:14 [71](#)
1:15-26 [71](#)
1:22 [94](#), [262](#)
2 [93](#)
2:1-4 [24](#), [91n](#)
2:2 [73](#)
2:3 [73](#), [225](#)
2:3-4 [349](#)
2:3, 4, 17 [226](#)
2:5 [71](#)
2:6 [74](#)
2:6-8 [74](#)
2:9 [71](#)
2:10 [71](#)
2:13 [74](#)
2:16, 17-18 [96](#)
2:17, 33 [225](#)
2:22 [76](#), [77](#)
2:22-31 [98](#)
2:23 [77](#), [240](#)
2:24 [77](#)
2:25-28 [77](#)
2:28 [78](#)

2:32 [63](#)
2:33 [47](#), [77](#), [78](#), [166](#)
2:34 [78](#)
2:34, 35 [78](#), [178](#)
2:36 [78](#)
2:37 [78](#)
2:38, 39 [77](#), [78](#), [219](#), [228](#)
2:40 [77](#)
2:41 [69](#), [226](#)
3:3 [192](#)
3:22-23 [178](#)
4:27, 28 [240](#)
4:28 [77](#)
4:32 [206](#)
5:21 [192](#)
6:1-6 [198](#)
7:8 [227](#)
7:37 [178](#)
7:38 [177](#), [178](#), [227](#)
8 [93](#)
8:4-12 [87](#)
8:14, 15 [87](#)
8:16 [87](#)
8:17 [88](#)
8:20-22 [221](#)
9:5 [126](#)

9:15 [218](#)
9:42 [140](#)
10 [9](#)
10:1 [316](#)
10:9-18 [194](#)
10:19-48 [88](#)
10:37 [93](#), [95](#), [262](#)
10:38 [61](#)
10:44-46 [88](#)
10:45 [225](#)
10:47, 48 [226](#)
11:15, 16 [225](#)
11:17 [140](#)
11:21 [136](#)
11:27-28 [96](#)
11:28 [101](#), [198](#)
13:1, 2 [198](#)
13:1-3 [96](#)
13:2 [303](#)
13:17 [235](#)
13:41 [242](#)
13:48 [239](#), [240](#)
14:3 [97](#)
14:23 [197](#)
14:27 [118](#)
15:28, 32 [96](#)

15:32 [198](#)
16:4 [199](#)
16:14 [118](#), [124](#)
16:33 [226](#)
17:31 [63](#)
18:24-27, 28 [118](#)
19 [83](#)
19:2-6 [89](#)
19:32, 39, 40 [178](#)
20:7 [298](#)
20:17 [197](#), [199](#)
20:17, 28 [196](#)
20:23 [96](#)
20:28 [197](#), [199](#)
21:8 [198](#)
21:10-11 [96](#), [101](#)
21:28 [185](#)
22:5 [192](#)
22:16 [219](#)
22:19 [140](#)
23:17-31 [316](#)
26:5 [127](#)
26:18 [136](#)

Romans

1:1 [123](#)

1:4 63
1:7 125
1:18 125, 240, 324
1:18-20 252
1:18-32 322
1:21-32 110
1:24-31 322
1:25-31 125
1:28 242
2:1 126
2:4 348
2:5 242
3:25 292
3:26 155
4:1 290
4:3 154, 188
4:3-6, 9, 11 156
4:4, 5 154
4:8 156
4:11 227
4:16 238
4:25 155
5:1 158
5:2 213
5:3-5 290
5:5 43, 69, 82, 184, 272, 279, 321

5:9 156
5:10 272
5:12-21 57, 89, 110, 116, 213, 235
5:17 156
5:18 213
5:19 156
5:20 213
6 113, 163
6:1-7:6 163
6:1-6 93
6:1-10 101
6:2 90
6:2-6 225
6:3 78n, 163
6:3-5 341
6:3-6 182, 218, 272
6:3-7 274
6:4 63
6:11 165
6:14 146
6:17 272
6:19 124
7:13 143
7:14 161
7:15-25 166
7:22 146

7:24 [148](#)
8:2 [129](#)
8:7 [125](#)
8:11 [51](#), [63](#), [176](#), [273](#)
8:14-16 [170](#)
8:14-17 [262](#)
8:14-21 [102](#)
8:15 [102](#)
8:15, 16 [67](#)
8:28 [306](#)
8:28, 29 [111](#), [162](#)
8:28-30 [114](#), [116](#), [158](#)
8:28-39 [183](#)
8:29 [90](#), [114](#), [235](#), [289](#)
8:29, 30 [240](#)
8:32 [247](#)
8:35-39 [114](#)
9:6 [238](#)
9:11 [238](#)
9:11-13 [239](#)
9:15-16, 20-22 [238](#)
9:17, 18 [243](#)
9:19 [238](#)
9:21 [239](#)
9:22, 23 [242](#), [245](#)
9:23 [240](#)

9:33 [139](#)
10:8-10 [272](#)
10:9 [144](#)
10:9, 10 [213](#)
10:11 [139](#)
11:2 [235](#)
11:5, 6 [243](#)
11:7 [238](#), [243](#)
11:8-10 [243](#)
11:11-25 [188](#)
11:13-26 [179](#)
11:15 [188](#)
11:16 [228](#)
11:17 [114](#), [274](#)
11:23 [188](#)
11:33 36 [241](#)
12:1-2 [110](#)
12:2 [168](#)
12:3-8 [186](#)
12:6-8 [115](#)
12:8 [193](#), [197](#)
12:11 [304](#)
12:17 [316](#)
12:20 [281](#)
13:4 [315](#)
13:5 [309](#)

13:8 [334](#)
13:9 [334](#)
13:10 [334](#)
13:13 [322](#)
13:14 [247](#)
14:5, 6 [298](#)
14:7-9 [275](#)
15:7 [203](#)
15:18-19 [94](#)
15:29 [80](#)

1 Corinthians

1:2 [125](#), [163](#)
1:9 [124](#)
1:12 [199](#)
1:13 [185](#), [218](#)
1:30 [53](#), [117](#), [138](#)
2:7 [240](#), [251](#)
2:10-12 [49](#)
2:11-16 [45](#)
2:12-25 [205](#)
2:13 [198](#)
2:14 [126](#), [131](#)
2:14-15 [239](#)
2:16 [146](#)
3:6-9 [179](#)

3:11 [179](#)
3:12-17 [179](#)
3:16, 17 [179](#)
6:9-10 [322](#)
6:9-11 [316](#), [323](#)
6:11 [163](#), [219](#)
6:15 [323](#)
7:2 [320](#)
7:14 [228](#)
7:20 [305](#)
7:20-24 [123](#)
9:8-10 [284](#)
9:15 [284](#)
10:1, 2 [226](#)
10:2 [218](#)
10:4 [73](#)
10:9 [289](#)
10:16 [230](#)
10:17 [185](#)
10:21 [230](#)
10:31 [304](#)
11:7 [318](#)
11:20 [230](#)
11:20-34 [229](#)
12:3 [45](#), [83](#), [186](#), [213](#)
12:5, 6 [186](#)

12:8-11, 28 [115](#)
12:10 [198](#)
12:11, 28 [186](#)
12:12 [185](#)
12:13 [87](#), [89](#), [102](#), [182](#), [185](#), [213](#), [274](#), [341](#)
12-14 [186](#)
12:20 [185](#)
12:24, 25 [186](#)
12:28 [115](#), [193](#), [197](#)
13:4, 5 [330](#)
13:1 [92](#)
13:2 [198](#)
14 [91](#)
14:2-5, 18, 39 [92](#)
14:3 [198](#)
14:10 [92](#)
14:12 [92](#)
14:12, 26 [186](#)
14:14-16 [92](#)
14:24-25 [96](#), [211](#)
14:26, 30 [96](#)
14:26-31 [92](#)
14:29-31 [92](#)
14:30 [92](#)
14:40 [113](#)
15:1-3 [196](#)

15:15 [63](#)
15:15-22 [110](#)
15:20-22 [116](#)
15:20-26 [64](#)
15:21 [182](#)
15:21-25 [98](#)
15:22 [89](#)
15:22, 23 [182](#)
15:44-45, 49 [176](#)
15:45 [64](#), [129](#)
15:45-46 [50](#)
15:45-50 [110](#)
15:51-52 [92](#)
16:2 [298](#)
16:6-10 [96](#)

2 Corinthians

1:21-22 [70](#)
3:2, 3 [274](#)
3:3 [70](#), [122](#)
3:17 [64](#)
3:17-18 [64](#), [65](#)
3:18 [162](#), [201](#), [203](#), [345](#)
4:6 [278](#)
4:10 [273](#)
4:14 [273](#)

5:14 [113](#)
5:17 [136](#), [182](#), [278](#)
5:18-19 [342](#)
5:18, 20 [194](#)
5:18-21 [282](#)
5:19 [156](#)
5:21 [54](#), [78](#), [156](#), [226](#)
6:9 [273](#)
6:16 [332](#)
8:9 [213](#)
8:22-23 [94](#)
11:2 [181](#)
12:12 [97](#), [198](#)
12:20 [311](#), [330](#)
13:14 [89](#)

Galatians

1:4 [110](#)
1:15 [124](#)
1:16 [272](#)
1:23 [149](#)
2:20 [47](#), [82](#), [91](#), [93](#), [100](#), [101](#), [145](#), [272](#), [278](#), [332](#)
3:1 [145](#)
3:2 [47](#), [82](#)
3:6 [156](#)
3:6-14 [154](#)

3:6-16 235
3:7 114
3:7-9 154
3:14, 26, 29 237
3:27 78n, 90, 114, 218
4:4, 5 121, 181
4:5 67
4:6 102, 121, 170, 171, 272
4:6, 7 82
4:9-11 298, 299
4:11 145, 299
4:19 183
4:22-31 114
4:24, 25, 29 180
4:26 180
4:29 127
5:14 350
5:16 82, 350
5:17 146, 166
5:19-21 110, 322, 350
5:22, 23 101, 112, 115, 274, 279, 350
5:24 350
5:25 82, 350
6:1 350
6:2 350
6:9, 10 350

6:16 [238](#)

Ephesians

1 [93](#)

1:3-14 [114](#)

1:5 [240](#)

1:10, 22-23 [193](#)

1:11 [113](#), [240](#)

1:15-20 [142](#)

1:17, 18 [34](#)

1:17-19 [341](#)

1:17-20 [90](#), [91](#)

1:19, 20 [273](#)

1:19, 22, 23 [203](#)

1:23 [183](#)

2 [93](#)

2:1 [125](#), [136](#)

2:1-3 [128](#)

2:1-7 [113](#)

2:2 [110](#)

2:4-10 [128](#)

2:5-8 [350](#)

2:6 [112n](#), [182](#), [292](#), [350](#)

2:6-7 [348](#)

2:8, 9 [154](#)

2:10 [240](#), [350](#)

2:13-22 [188](#)
2:14 [112](#), [185](#)
2:15 [90](#)
2:18 [91](#)
2:19-20 [95](#)
2:20 [193](#), [196](#), [198](#)
2:21 [350](#)
2:21, 22 [183](#)
2:22 [350](#)
3:5 [96](#), [198](#)
3:14, 15 [169](#), [317](#)
3:16 [135](#)
3:17 [47](#), [135](#)
3:17-19 [135](#)
3:19 [183](#)
3:21 [203](#)
4 [186](#)
4:2, 3 [350](#)
4:4 [185](#), [206](#)
4:4-6 [185](#)
4:4-16 [193](#), [206](#)
4:8-13 [115](#)
4:10 [350](#)
4:10-13 [142](#)
4:11 [115](#), [198](#)
4:13 [183](#)

4:15 [90](#), [114](#), [247](#)
4:15, 16 [183](#)
4:21 [184](#)
4:22, 24 [126](#), [149](#)
4:23 [159](#), [184](#)
4:24 [159](#), [162](#)
4:25-28 [149](#)
4:28 [332](#)
4:30 [47](#), [347](#)
4:30-32 [149](#)
4:30-5:1 [350](#)
4:31 [348](#)
4:32 [279](#), [350](#)
5:4 [350](#)
5:8 [143](#), [278](#), [324](#), [350](#)
5:11, 12 [278](#), [324](#)
5:13 [278](#)
5:14 [273](#), [350](#)
5:17 [278](#)
5:18 [103](#), [278](#), [351](#)
5:19, 20 [103](#)
5:20, 21 [278](#), [351](#)
5:21-33 [317](#)
5:22 [351](#)
5:22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 32 [279](#)
5:22, 23, 32 [176](#)

5:22-26 [332](#)
5:24, 25 [351](#)
5:24, 25, 26, 29 [181](#)
5:25 [184](#)
5:27 [208](#)
5:31-32 [250](#)
5:32 [212](#)
6:2 [308](#)
6:5 [304](#)
6:7 [304](#)
6:12 [173](#)

Philippians

1:1 [198](#), [199](#)
1:21 [100](#), [146](#), [151](#), [274](#), [278](#)
2:1 [47](#)
2:3 [276](#), [349](#)
2:13 [146](#)
2:25 [94](#)
4:3 [242](#)
4:7 [112](#)
9 [308](#)

Colossians

1:9, 10 [168](#)
1:10-12 [332](#)
1:18 [193](#)

1:19 [254](#)
1:21, 22 [188](#)
1:27 [65](#), [82](#), [112n](#), [272](#), [274](#), [332](#)
2:3 [183](#)
2:9 [293](#)
2:10 [183](#)
2:10-15 [219](#)
2:11 [218](#)
2:11, 12 [228](#)
2:12 [274](#)
2:15 [59](#)
2:16, 17 [298](#), [299](#)
3:1 [165](#)
3:1, 2 [168](#)
3:1-3 [276](#)
3:1-4 [113](#)
3:1-5 [333](#)
3:3 [272](#), [278](#)
3:4 [165](#), [278](#)
3:5 [165](#)
3:5-9 [322](#)
3:5-14 [276](#)
3:10 [159](#), [162](#)
3:15 [185](#)
3:16 [278](#)
3:18-22 [276](#)

3:22 [304](#)
4:2, 3 [276](#)
4:6 [276](#), [330](#)

1 Thessalonians

1:4-6 [239](#)
1:5 [143](#)
4:8 [198](#)
5:7 [74](#)
5:19 [349](#)
5:23 [125](#)
5:24 [125](#)

2 Thessalonians

2:11 [242](#)
3:5 [147](#)

1 Timothy

1:9-10 [322](#)
1:16 [139](#)
1:18 [198](#)
3:1 [197](#), [199](#)
3:1-7 [197](#)
3:2 [197](#), [320](#)
3:5 [197](#)
3:8, 12 [198](#)
3:8-13 [198](#)

3:10, 13 [198](#)
3:15 [141](#), [335](#)
3:15-16 [97](#)
3:16 [63](#)
4:14 [197](#)
5:1 [197](#)
5:3 [304](#)
5:9 [304](#)
5:9, 10 [304](#)
5:14 [304](#)
5:17 [196](#)
6:6 [330](#)
6:16 [250](#), [278](#)

2 Timothy

1:8, 9 [124](#)
2:2 [197](#)
2:21 [163](#)
3:16 [38](#), [257](#)
4:5 [198](#)

Titus

1:5 [196](#), [197](#), [199](#)
1:5, 7 [197](#)
1:6-9 [197](#)
1:7 [197](#), [199](#)
1:9 [197](#)

2:2, 3 [308](#)

2:4, 5 [332](#)

3:2 [311](#)

3:5 [128](#), [166](#), [219](#)

Philemon

v.19 [334](#)

Hebrews

1:1, 2 [178](#)

1:2 [68](#)

1:3 [159](#), [162](#), [286](#), [293](#)

1:9 [53](#), [64](#), [112](#)

1:13 [178](#)

2:3, 4 [196](#)

2:4 [198](#)

2:8-18 [114](#)

2:9 [294](#)

2:9-11 [52](#)

2:10 [53](#)

2:10-13, 15, 18 [294](#)

2:11 [114](#), [275](#)

2:11-12 [53](#)

2:12 [178](#)

2:16 [114](#)

1:3 [51](#)

2:14-15 [114](#)

2:14-17 [182](#)
2:14-18 [21](#), [26](#), [52](#)
3:1-3 [187](#)
3:12 [172](#)
3:14 [172](#)
3:15 [172](#)
3:17-19 [294](#)
4:1-11 [294](#)
4:14 [172](#)
4:16 [172](#), [294](#)
5:4 [226](#)
5:4-10 [226](#)
5:7 [62](#)
5:7-9 [54](#)
5:8, 9 [65](#)
6:4-6 [173](#)
6:18 [294](#)
6:19 [292](#)
6:20 [294](#)
7:24-28 [294](#)
7:25 [343](#)
8 [40](#)
8:2 [292](#)
8:5 [35](#)
8:6-13 [280](#)
8:8-13 [237](#)

8:10 [294](#)
8:10, 11 [188](#)
8:10-13 [45](#)
9:10-23 [226](#)
9:11-14 [280](#)
9:12 [292](#)
9:13, 14, 26 [230](#)
9:14 [59](#), [61](#), [100](#), [148](#), [292](#)
9:24 [280](#), [292](#)
10 [40](#)
10:5-10 [122](#)
10:7 [138](#)
10:12-13 [178](#)
10:14 [292](#)
10:15-17 [45](#)
10:19 [292](#)
10:21-22 [280](#)
10:22 [148](#)
10:24 [280](#)
10:25 [178](#)
10:29 [45](#)
10:36 [290](#)
11:1 [140](#), [145](#)
11:10 [290](#)
11:10, 16 [180](#)
11:40 [145](#)

12:1 [166](#)
12:2 [52](#), [61](#), [112](#), [113](#), [144](#), [146](#), [209](#)
12:18-24 [180](#)
13:7 [197](#)
13:8 [100](#)
13:25 [145](#)

James

1:5 [17](#)
1:18 [69](#)
2:2 [178](#)
2:23 [156](#)
3:15 [127](#)
4:7 [343](#)
4:11 [311](#)
5:14 [197](#)

1 Peter

1:3 [182](#)
1:4-5 [173](#)
1:5 [174](#)
1:10-11 [63](#)
1:15-16 [159](#), [336](#)
1:20 [233](#)
1:22 [149](#)
2:4 [179](#)
2:4-10 [24](#)

2:5 [179, 188](#)
2:5, 9 [23](#)
2:6 [139](#)
2:8 [241](#)
2:9 [38, 125, 278](#)
2:9, 10 [177](#)
2:14 [315](#)
2:19 [309](#)
2:21-22 [275](#)
2:21, 24 [138](#)
2:21-25 [281](#)
2:24 [237, 244](#)
3:1-17 [275](#)
3:5-6 [318](#)
3:7 [318](#)
3:8 [310](#)
3:18 [63, 334](#)
3:20-21 [54](#)
3:21 [219](#)
3:25 [136](#)
4 [186](#)
4:1-16, 19 [275](#)
4:1-4 [113](#)
4:11 [115](#)
4:14 [274](#)
5:1 [197](#)

5:1, 2 [196](#)

5:1-3 [197](#)

5:2 [197](#)

5:2, 3 [332](#)

5:3 [197](#)

5:4 [179](#)

5:4-7 [276](#)

5:8-9 [275](#)

2 Peter

1:4 [40](#), [275](#), [277](#)

1:4-5 [277](#)

1:5 [277](#)

1:6 [277](#)

1:7 [277](#)

1:19-21 [257](#)

1:20, 21 [38](#), [97](#)

2:4 [244](#)

2:12 [241](#)

3:2 [96](#)

3:13 [237](#)

3:15-16 [97](#)

1 John

1:1 [178](#)

1:1-2 [162](#)

1:5 [278](#), [335](#)

1:7 [136](#), [278](#)
1:9 [321](#), [323](#)
1:10 [208](#)
2:1 [80](#)
2:1, 2 [208](#)
2:5 [136](#)
2:6 [321](#)
2:15-17 [144](#), [337](#)
2:20 [254](#)
2:27-29 [321](#)
3:1 [169](#)
3:2 [162](#)
3:6-9 [164](#)
3:9 [136](#)
3:10 [136](#)
4:2, 3 [164](#)
4:4 [286](#)
4:7-11 [321](#)
4:8 [112](#), [279](#)
4:10 [321](#)
4:12, 13 [149](#)
4:19 [136](#)
4:20 [279](#)
5:1 [144](#)
5:1-2 [279](#)
5:2 [136](#)

5:3 [286](#)
5:4 [145](#)
5:9-12 [198](#)
5:13 [136](#)

Jude

4 [241](#)
6 [244](#)
7 [322](#)

Revelation

1:6 [23](#)
1:10 [297](#)
2:10 [327](#)
3:12 [180](#)
3:15-19 [134](#)
3:20 [167](#)
4:5 [51](#)
5:5 [178](#)
5:9 [209](#)
7:13, 14 [234](#)
11:3 [198](#)
13:8 [77](#), [233](#), [241](#), [244](#)
17:17 [241](#)
19:7 [180](#)
19:9 [176](#)
19:10 [20](#), [178](#)

21:1-5	237
21:2, 9	181
21:8	322
21:14	95
21:23	278
21:27	234
22:1	276
22:2	276
22:5	278
22:17	181
22:18-19	95

PERSONS INDEX

A Brakel, Wilhelmus [330](#)

Aaron [21](#), [37](#)

Abner [22](#), [303](#)

Abraham [18](#), [78](#), [113](#), [114](#), [134](#), [154](#), [156](#), [175](#), [187](#), [188](#), [227](#), [235](#), [237](#), [238](#), [254](#), [255](#), [290](#), [302](#), [303](#), [308](#), [315](#), [320](#), [334](#), [337](#)

Absalom [23](#)

Aquinas, Thomas [17](#), [215](#), [220](#), [284](#), [285](#), [298](#), [307](#), [309](#), [328](#), [329](#)

Agabus [101](#)

Ahab [256](#)

Alexander, Joseph Addison [70](#), [71](#), [74](#), [89](#)

Auber, Henriette [160](#)

Bannerman, Douglas [190](#), [191](#), [192](#)

Barnabas [97](#), [118](#), [190](#), [197](#), [199](#), [303](#)

Barm, Karl [50](#), [305](#), [314](#), [327](#)

Bathsheba [22](#), [131](#)

Bavinck, Herman [19](#), [29](#), [33](#), [39](#), [178](#), [206](#), [211](#), [212](#), [245](#)

Beattie, James [171](#)

Beckwith, Roger [99](#)

Benedict XVI, Pope [300](#)

Berengar [215](#)

Berkhof, Louis [251](#), [252](#), [253](#)

Berkouwer, G. C [206, 212, 245](#)
 Bernard of Clairvaux [101](#)
 Bezaleel [35](#)
 Boston, Thomas [126, 143, 146, 147, 153](#)
 Brentz, John [217](#)
 Brown, Colin [135](#)
 Bruce, F. F [87, 89, 180, 263, 267, 299](#)
 Buchanan [155, 157](#)
 Bullinger, Heinrich [40](#)

Calvin, John [50, 90, 142, 161, 182, 194, 202, 214, 239, 249, 250, 251, 262, 283-4, 289, 291, 343](#)
 Abraham [190](#)
 baptism [90, 222, 223](#)
 Bishop of Rome [200](#)
 Church [176, 194, 201, 206, 208, 211](#)
 Council of Nicaea [199-200](#)
 Holy Spirit [63, 88, 91, 101-2, 117, 157, 231, 261, 271](#)
 human nature of Jesus [114](#)
 Letter to Sadoletto [207](#)
 moral law [284, 285](#)
 natural revelation [251](#)
 prayer [343](#)
 Reply to Sadoletto [291](#)
 sacraments [214, 222, 223, 231-2](#)
 Sermon on the Acts of
 the Apostles [91](#)
 special revelation [253, 254](#)
 ten commandments [295, 296, 297, 309, 312-13, 320-21, 328-9, 335, 338](#)

The Necessity of Reforming
 the Church 291
 unity 206
 worship 291-2

Campbell Morgan, G 321

Capito, Wolfgang 30

Carson, D. A 92, 94, 96

Cassuto, U 297, 314

Chalmers, Thomas 338

Chemnitz, Martin 217

Childs, Brevard 97

Chrysostom, John 70

Clement of Alexandria 140

Clement of Rome 185, 202, 266

Colquhoun, John 139

Cornelius 87, 88, 226

Courthial, Pierre 52, 53, 72, 75, 81, 187, 209, 218, 226, 260

Cousins, Mrs Anne Ross 233

Cremer, Hermann 152

Cyprian, Bishop of
 Carthage 194, 209, 210, 226

Cyril of Alexandria 85, 203

Cyril of Jerusalem 82

Dabney, Robert L 147, 148, 298, 300, 337

David, King 20, 22-3, 26, 32, 35-9, 51, 77-9, 131, 143, 159, 168, 236,
 243, 255, 260, 264, 289, 303, 335-6, 345

Dawson, Gerrit [68](#), [80](#)
De Young, Kevin [322](#)
Deanesly, Margaret [201](#)
Dick, Dr John [110-111](#), [241](#)
Didymus the Blind [82](#)
Doane, William C [276-7](#)
Dodd, C. H [208](#)
Dostoevsky, Fyodor [57n](#), [306](#)
Dulles, Avery [202](#), [207-9](#)

Edersheim, Alfred [224](#)
Edwards, Jonathan [104](#), [185](#), [221](#), [311](#), [348](#), [349](#)
Edwards, Mrs Sarah [311](#)
Elchaninov, Alexander [349](#), [351](#)
Eldad [38](#)
Eli [243](#), [255](#)
Elijah [74](#), [96](#), [160](#), [253](#), [256](#), [308](#)
Epiphanius [84](#), [85](#)
Esau [238](#), [239](#), [302](#), [303](#)
Esther, Queen [129](#)

Fee, Dr Gordon [92](#)
Fitzmyer, Joseph [37](#)
Freud, Sigmund [326](#)

Gaffin, R. B [93](#), [94](#), [98](#)
Gallagher, Maggie [332](#)

Gazzaniga, Michael 170
Gideon 79, 252
Girardeau, John L 169, 171
Grant, Jonathan 317, 325
Green, Michael 92
Green, W. H 265
Gregory I 200
Gregory Nazianzus 19, 29, 42, 84, 85, 184, 219
Gregory of Nyssa 84, 219
Grudem, Dr Wayne 100, 101

Ham 154, 235, 255
Hays, Richard B 145
Hendricksen, William 48
Henley Thornwell, James 335
Herron, A 214, 229
Hill, Christopher 305
Hodge, Charles 308, 328
Hophni 243
Hugo of Saint Victor 213

Ingram, R. T 296
Isaac 193, 227, 255, 302
Isbosheth 22

Jacob 37, 76, 238, 239, 255, 297, 302, 303, 320
Jacobs, Charles M 218

James (Apostle) [69, 79](#)

James, Sharon [319](#)

Japheth [154, 235, 255](#)

Jehoshaphat [23, 256](#)

Jenkins, Philip [100](#)

Jeremias, J [229](#)

Jerome [187, 199](#)

Jesus Christ

ascension of [24, 25, 78, 87](#)

baptism of [23, 24, 49, 53-5, 56, 226-7, 259, 340](#)

body of [181-8](#)

bride of [181](#)

childhood of [52-3](#)

crucifixion and death [24, 25, 52, 61, 63, 77, 78, 134, 163](#)

humanity of [26, 35, 51, 52, 62, 66, 114, 181, 182, 216, 217](#)

imitation of [275-6](#)

as king [23](#)

ministry of [59, 60, 61, 226](#)

prayer [44, 116, 145, 206, 234, 275, 277, 303, 335, 339](#)

as priest [21](#)

on prophets [20-21](#)

repentance and redemptive

suffering [41, 52, 54, 64, 77, 78, 114, 116, 133, 134, 137-9, 155, 157, 182, 316, 337, 341](#)

resistance to [353](#)

resurrection of [24, 25, 63-6, 77, 78, 79, 80, 87, 94, 134, 163, 182, 264](#)

temptation of [56-9, 259](#)

union with [109-111, 112, 114, 115, 117, 121-49, 163, 164, 169, 172](#)

view of scripture [259-60](#)

Joel, Prophet [32](#), [74](#), [76](#), [130](#)
John the Baptist [53](#), [89](#), [95](#), [133](#), [137](#), [225](#), [226](#), [316](#)
Joseph [25](#), [34](#), [48](#), [76](#), [254](#)
Josephus [189](#), [192](#), [264](#), [320](#),
Josiah [23](#), [324](#)
Judas [71](#), [77](#), [95](#), [136](#), [172](#)
Justin Martyr [266](#)

Kirk, Pastor Jerry [323-4](#)
Kittel, G [170](#)
Kline, Meredith [228](#), [263](#)
Knight, George A. F [40](#), [93](#), [95](#), [97](#)
Knox, John [57](#), [81](#), [211](#)
Kruger, Dr Mike [94](#), [96](#), [98](#), [262](#)
Kuhn, Thomas [144](#)

Laban [193](#), [297](#), [302](#)
Lampe, G. H. W [88](#)
Lazarus [63](#), [134](#)
Leah [297](#), [302](#)
Lemann, Augustin [41](#)
Lenin [330](#)
Leupold, H. C [30](#), [296](#)
Lightfoot, John [224](#)
Lombard, Peter [214](#)
Luther, Martin [214](#), [216](#), [217](#), [218](#), [283](#), [284](#), [285](#), [305](#)

MacArthur, Dr John 104

Marcion 98, 267

Marshall, I. Howard 48, 54

Matthias 71

McGrath, Alister 152

Medad 38

Micaiah 256

Milligan, William 65

Morris, Leon 277

Moses 18, 20, 21, 25, 26, 31, 34-8, 50, 59, 72, 74, 76, 96, 133, 159, 172, 177, 188, 192, 226, 229, 235, 243, 255, 264, 288, 289, 292, 320, 322

Murray, Andrew 288, 345

Murray, John 111, 113, 128, 155-6, 164, 169, 171, 177, 182-3, 187, 196-7, 221, 227-8, 304, 331

Nahor 154

Nicodemus 45, 77, 127, 130,

Noah 18, 54, 113, 153, 154, 235, 255, 297, 302

Novatian 142

Oholiab 35

Owen, John 35, 138, 145, 165-6, 167, 293

Palmer, B. M 341

Paschasius Radbertus 215

Pelikan, Jeroslav 214, 215

Philo 41, 189

Phinehas 243

Plato [238](#)

Polycarp of Smyrna [210](#), [266](#)

Rachel [297](#), [302](#)

Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph [300](#)

Rebekah [193](#), [302](#)

Ridderbos, Herman N [195](#)

Rijssen, Leonard [230](#)

Roberts, Oral [342](#)

Roberts, Vaughan [326](#), [327](#)

Robertson, A. T [343](#)

Rollock, Robert [129](#)

Ross, Philip S [284](#)

Rushdoony, R. J [330](#), [331](#)

Rutherford, Samuel [70](#), [233](#)

Ryle, Bishop J. C [73](#), [161](#)

Saint Irenaeus [18](#), [56](#), [57](#), [122](#), [140](#), [182](#), [210](#)

Samson [79](#)

Sanneh, Professor Lamin [75](#)

Saul [22](#), [31](#), [79](#), [303](#)

Schilder, K [62](#)

Schmemmann, Alexander [223n](#), [231n](#), [232n](#), [252](#)

Schurer, E [189](#), [191](#)

Seth [153](#), [235](#)

Shem [154](#), [235](#), [255](#)

Shulevitz, Judith [301](#)

Simeon [242](#)

Solomon, King [23](#), [35](#), [129](#), [203](#), [255](#), [303](#), [320](#)

Sowell, Professor Thomas [332](#)

Spurgeon, Charles [70](#), [341](#)

St Athanasius [19](#), [31](#), [33](#), [40](#), [56](#), [82](#), [83](#), [84](#), [137-8](#)

St Augustine [18](#), [19](#), [47](#), [49](#), [55](#), [69](#), [84](#), [117](#), [142](#), [152](#), [213](#), [223](#), [232](#), [245](#), [315](#), [337](#)

St Basil [17](#), [33](#), [45](#), [78n](#), [81](#), [83](#), [84](#), [184](#)

St Hilary [141](#), [250](#)

Staniloae, Dumitru [23](#), [45-6](#), [61](#), [65](#), [68](#), [83](#), [176](#), [202](#), [203](#), [206](#), [207](#), [208](#), [220](#), [272](#)

Stephen [177](#), [227](#)

Stewart, James S [78](#)

Still, Rev. William [300](#)

Stonehouse, N. B [265](#)

Storms, Sam [103](#), [104](#)

Struthers, William [325](#)

Swete, Henry B [29](#), [35](#)

Tawney, R. H [304](#)

Terah [154](#)

Tertullian [219](#)

Thieme, R. B [172](#)

Thomas (Apostle) [63](#), [79](#)

Thompson, Dr Curt [136](#), [147](#)

Thornwell, James H [62](#), [335](#)

Torrance, T. F [43-6](#), [131](#), [140](#), [145](#), [152](#), [157](#), [216-17](#), [261](#)

Turretin, Francis [19](#), [169](#), [287](#), [288](#), [294](#), [295](#), [312](#), [316](#)

Viret, Pierre [31](#), [33](#)

Vitringa [189](#)

Vos, Geerhardus [41](#), [64](#), [187](#)

Walker, Andrew T [326](#), [327](#)

Wallace, Ronald S [91](#), [117](#), [118-9](#), [222](#)

Warfield, B. B [36](#), [42](#), [94](#), [98](#), [139](#), [140](#), [157](#), [257](#), [258-9](#), [297](#), [299](#)

Watson, David [186](#)

Watson, Thomas [337](#), [338](#)

Webb, R. A [169](#)

Weber, Max [304](#)

Westermann, Claus [30](#)

Whyte, Alexander [329](#)

witch of Endor [22](#)

Wright, David F [211](#)

Wright, N. T [41](#), [185](#), [322](#)

Young, E. J [31](#), [263-5](#)

Zerubbabel [37](#), [39](#)

Zwingli, Huldrych [214](#), [215](#), [216](#)

SUBJECT INDEX

A

- abortion [99](#), [314-15](#)
- Abrahamic covenant [18](#), [187](#), [227](#), [263](#)
- accompaniments of faith [146-9](#)
- active obedience [64](#), [137](#), [138](#), [157](#)
- Ad Serapionem* [40](#)
- adoption [168-74](#)
- adoptionists [55](#)
- Adoration in Spirit and Truth* [203](#)
- adultery [22](#), [288](#), [313](#), [316](#), [317-19](#), [324](#), [334](#), [350](#)
- Adversus Haereses* [210](#)
- affections [121](#), [146](#), [147-8](#), [167](#)
- Amalekites [22](#)
- apostasy [20](#), [23](#), [131](#), [173](#), [201](#), [324](#)
- apostolic succession [210-11](#)
- apostolicam [205](#), [210-11](#)
- apostolicity [94-5](#)

B

- Babylon [18](#), [23](#), [76](#), [189](#), [303](#), [343](#)
- Babylonian Captivity [218](#), [223](#), [252](#)
- Babylonian Captivity of*

the Church, The 218, 283

baptism 52, 78, 127, 163, 198, 207, 212, 213, 214, 218-28, 231, 274, 316

of Christ 23, 24, 49, 53-5, 56, 226-7, 259, 340

of repentance 137, 138

spirit baptism 87-105

water baptism 93, 223, 225

Book of Common Prayer 161

Book of Sentences 214

C

California Asuza Street Revival 100

calling 79, 111, 123-5, 129, 163, 168, 169, 170, 250, 252, 254

Calvinism 210, 304

canon of scripture, the 262-7

Canons of Dort, The 245

capital punishment 313, 315-16

Catechism of the Catholic Church, The 220, 221, 325

catholicam 205, 209-10

cessationism 100, 104

Chalcedon 216

Charismatic movement 92, 99, 100, 101, 103, 104-5

Christian life 102, 103, 111, 112, 114, 123, 163, 231, 271-85, 288, 304, 345, 352

Church Fathers 18, 19, 54, 82, 142, 153, 176, 250, 315

Church 175-203

attributes of 205-11

biblical images of 178-80

- as body of Christ 181-8
- church order 188-92
- connectional church government 198-9
- government 192-202
- marks of 211-32
- Medieval Church 211
- pluriformity 206
- circumcision 36, 40, 45, 50, 51, 156, 199, 219, 227, 228
- Commentary on Hebrews* 291
- communication of properties 216, 217
- Concerning True and False Religion* 214
- confession 36, 136, 165
- conscience 121, 146, 148-9
- continuationism 100-101
- conversion 93-4, 124, 129-39, 18, 173, 226, 243
- Corinth 92, 163, 266, 316
- Council of Lyons 215
- Council of Nicaea 199, 209
- Council of Trent 214, 215, 265
- covenants
 - Abrahamic covenant 18, 78, 187, 263
 - Covenant of Grace 87, 175, 187, 205, 213, 227, 294
 - covenant of marriage 318
 - covenant of the bow 113
 - Davidic covenant 263
 - Mosaic covenant 18, 187, 263
 - Noahic covenant 18, 187

D

Davidic Kingdom 20
De Spiritu Sancto 33, 45
De Vita Contemplativa 189
*Definitio contra Albigenses
et Catharios* 215
Deism 30, 99-100, 351, 352
Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit 166
Dispensationalists 177

E

Eden 18, 50, 301, 317
effectual calling 111, 123, 124, 129, 169
Egypt 25, 34, 36, 56, 69, 229, 235, 255, 286
election 233-247
Emmaus 134, 260, 264
eschaton 51, 208
Eucharistic Words of Jesus, The 229
Euthyphro 238
extrinsic concept 97, 98

F

faith 139-45, 157-8, 272-3
fall of man 18, 151, 153
false witness 334-7
fasting 132, 288-9, 339, 340, 344
Flood 31, 54, 254, 255

forgiveness [114](#), [134-5](#), [143](#), [194](#), [219](#), [253](#), [279-82](#), [311](#), [316](#), [341-3](#), [352-3](#)

Freedom of the Christian Man, The [283](#)

G

Garden of Eden [18](#), [50](#), [301](#), [317](#)

general and special

revelation [249](#), [251](#), [252-4](#)

General Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon [265](#)

Genevan Catechism [161](#)

Gibeonites [295](#)

Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, The [100](#)

gift of the Holy Spirit [19](#), [66](#), [67-71](#), [79-82](#)

Gift, the [18](#), [19](#), [30-38](#), [44](#), [47](#), [83](#), [109](#), [112](#), [158](#), [223](#)

H

Hebron [22](#)

Histories, the [20](#), [24](#), [25](#), [29](#)

History of Susanna, The [189](#)

Holy Spirit

 New Testament [43-66](#), [104](#)

 Old Testament [23-7](#), [29-42](#)

homosexuality [315](#), [321-4](#), [326](#)

honor [327-8](#), [347-53](#)

hypostasis [44-7](#)

I

Iconium [97](#)

ideal financial situation 333

idolatry 20, 23, 26, 236, 252, 313, 350

Israel

covenant with 25, 26, 43, 67, 69, 72, 152, 175, 235

election of 235, 236, 238

formation of 24

guilt of 26

history of 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 36, 57, 236, 238, 252

idolatry 26, 59

kings of 21-3, 39, 41, 256, 303

Old Testament 175, 177, 188-92

people of 34, 35, 76, 124, 129, 178, 229

prophets of 255, 256

redemption of 20, 36

Shema Israel 41, 286

wilderness 35, 50, 57, 58, 59, 172

Israelites 59, 172, 229, 255, 295, 313

J

Judah 20, 22, 23, 237, 320

Judaism 41, 76, 88, 137, 170, 180, 185, 189, 283, 340

justification 149, 151-74

K

kingship 20, 21-3, 237

L

Laodiceans 134

Larger Catechism of The Westminster Assembly, The 295, 307

Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit 82

Levirate marriage [320-21](#)
Liber de Corpore et Sanguine Domini [215](#)
living water [72](#), [73](#), [80](#), [277](#)
Lord's Prayer [280](#), [288](#), [339-45](#)
Lord's Supper [118](#), [213](#), [214](#), [218](#), [221](#), [222](#), [229-32](#)

M

meditation [167-8](#)
Medo Persia [23](#), [129](#)
Moab [21](#)
monogamy [319-20](#)
Montanists [98](#)
mortification [165-7](#), [276](#), [325](#), [333](#), [350](#)
mutual indwelling [43](#), [47](#), [49](#),
mysticism [101-4](#)

N

Narrative of Surprising Conversions, A [349](#)
natural revelation [251](#), [252](#)
Necessity of Reforming the Church, The [291](#)
New Covenant [18](#), [40](#), [45](#), [55](#), [67](#), [69](#), [70](#), [97](#), [164](#), [187](#), [237](#), [263](#), [280](#),
[285](#)

O

Of Apes and Peacocks [172](#)
On the Holy Spirit [81](#)
Oration on Holy Baptism [19](#)

P

Palestinian covenant 187

Paraclete 80-81

parents 307-13

passive obedience 64, 137, 138, 157

Passover 69, 70, 229, 230, 255, 297, 313

pastoral counsel 246-7

Pentateuch 18, 20, 25, 29, 249, 263, 302

Pentecost 26, 35, 38, 47, 65, 66, 67-85, 87, 88, 93, 98, 103, 225

Peter's Pentecostal Sermon 76-9

perichoresis 47, 49, 63n, 169, 217

Pharaoh 25, 34, 37, 243

Pharisees 60, 127, 133, 134, 164, 259, 260, 264, 288, 352

Philistines 22, 302

Platonic philosophy 238

Politics of Guilt and Pity 331

pornography 324-5, 326

prayer 168, 189, 190, 275, 276, 288, 289, 312, 339, 341, 344, 345

Promised land 18, 24, 25, 50, 69, 133, 190, 235

prophecy 20, 37-8, 48, 74-6, 92, 95-9, 100, 101, 115, 198, 254, 256, 257, 266, 303

Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, The 304

Puritanism and Revolution 305

purity 54, 148, 202, 207, 228, 276, 277, 291, 294, 321

Q

Quran 75

R

Red Sea 235

Reformation 96, 205, 206, 208, 210-12, 218, 283, 285, 349

regeneration 87, 89, 91, 93, 103, 111, 125-9, 139, 147-8, 163, 165, 169, 170, 173, 219-20, 278, 280

repentance 22, 53, 54, 76, 96, 111, 121, 123, 129-37, 138, 139, 171, 173, 219, 226, 284

Reply to Sadoleto 291

Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality 323

reprobation 239, 241-6, 322

restitution 333-4

revelation 43, 44, 75, 96, 101-3, 140, 159, 192, 193, 242, 249-54, 257, 266, 267, 272, 341, 351

Rome 23, 76, 191, 207, 226, 227

S

Sabbath 49, 159, 191, 296-301, 305, 313

sacraments 109, 118-19, 205, 207, 212-32

sacrifice 21, 22, 36, 50, 52, 62, 130, 155, 192, 203, 230, 279, 292, 313

salvation 17-20, 25, 43, 45, 69, 75, 88, 90, 93, 98, 132, 137, 154, 163, 171, 174, 180, 188, 206-8, 220, 227, 235, 237, 245-6, 249, 283-5, 334

sanctam 205, 208-9

sanctification 111, 112, 114, 116, 122, 123, 138, 151, 158-9, 162, 163-8, 171, 292, 294

Sanhedrin 190, 192

Satan 54, 57-60, 77, 136, 246, 259, 345, 352, 353

Scots Confession, The 212, 231

scribes 133, 190-91, 192, 197, 288

Second Great Awakening 104, 349
 Second Vatican Council 179, 207
 secular humanism 99
 Septuagint 139, 224
Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles 91
 Sermon on the Mount 160, 161, 203, 313, 314, 339
Sermons on the Song of Songs 101
 Shekinah glory 24, 48, 49, 55
Shema Israel, the 287
Shepherd of Hermas, The 176, 205, 234
 sin 36-7, 57, 82, 98, 111, 113, 125, 127-8, 132, 136, 143, 161, 164-5, 172, 245-6, 250, 307, 312, 320
 Adam's 116, 156, 182, 243, 327
 atonement for 52, 331
 confession of 21, 22, 208, 292
 consequences of 22, 153, 176
 of the flesh 228, 316, 321, 322, 323
 forgiveness of 45, 68, 79, 129, 155, 163, 194, 219, 280, 311, 352, 353
 mortification of 166-7
 noetic effects of 253, 262
 non-imputation of 156-7
 purification from 218, 219
 remission of 134, 137, 219
 repentance of 53, 54, 131, 134, 321
 sexual 327
 Sinai 67, 70, 180, 235, 297
 SNAG (stimulation of neural activation and growth) 136

Sodom and Gomorrah [302, 322](#)
special revelation [249, 251, 252-4](#)
spirit baptism [87-105](#)
Structure of Biblical Authority, The [263](#)
Summa Theologiae [215, 220, 298](#)
supernatural revelation [251-2, 253](#)

T

Tabernacle [20, 21, 24, 25, 35, 48, 50, 51, 69, 74, 203, 225, 274, 292, 293](#)
Talmud [70, 189, 264,](#)
Temple [21, 24, 27, 35, 37, 48, 49, 52, 55, 58, 72, 129, 185, 189, 192, 203, 242, 249, 260, 274, 293, 303, 312, 324](#)
ten commandments [161, 162, 235, 255, 283-6, 299, 307, 339, 340](#)
 first commandment [286-90, 340](#)
 second commandment [290-94](#)
 third commandment [294-6](#)
 fourth commandment [296-306](#)
 fifth commandment [307-13](#)
 sixth commandment [312-17](#)
 seventh commandment [317-28](#)
 eighth commandment [328-34](#)
 ninth commandment [330, 334-7](#)
 tenth commandment [337-8](#)
Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [137](#)
Theology of Prayer, The [341](#)
To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation [283](#)
tongues [71, 72, 73-5, 87, 88, 91-4, 100-104, 115](#)
Torah [24, 25, 53, 252, 260, 283, 334](#)

transgender [326-7](#)

transubstantiation [215-18](#)

tribe of Benjamin [22](#)

tribe of Judah [22](#)

Trinity [18, 27, 41-2, 43, 46, 47, 49, 52, 55, 67, 81, 82, 84, 85, 110, 151, 169, 249, 317, 340](#)

Triune God [18, 141, 143, 158, 160, 175, 233, 234, 249, 277, 278](#)

U

unam [205-8](#)

unction [19, 34, 52, 59-62, 75, 214](#)

V

Virgin Birth [48, 50, 254](#)

W

war [146, 256, 315, 316-17](#)

water baptism [93, 223, 225](#)

Westminster Confession of Faith, The [158, 207, 213, 246, 262, 284](#)

Westminster Shorter Catechism [165, 171, 301](#)

When the Time had Fully Come [195](#)

will [121, 126, 128, 146-7, 262](#)

Wisdom Literature [25, 29, 51](#)

With Christ in the School of Prayer [345](#)

Word of God [11, 25, 38, 61, 124, 140, 160, 173, 178, 212, 223, 232, 249-67, 271, 278, 297](#)

work [301-6](#)

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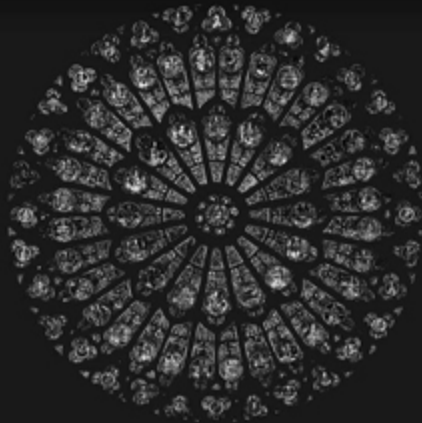
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