

THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS' INCORPORATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THEIR VIRTUES, WALK, AND PRACTICAL SERVICE

by Kerry S. Robichaux

To live is Christ.
(Phil. 1:21)

On the night before He died, in a most intimate time of fellowship, Christ opened to His beloved disciples the deep truths of who He is and of what was to become of them as His believers and apostles. Near the beginning of this discourse, recorded in John 14–16, the Lord speaks of His real identity with the Father and of the intrinsic significance of His works among them:

If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and henceforth you know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father. (John 14:7-12)

All genuine Christian believers understand that Christ is God incarnate (John 1:1, 14), but few understand more deeply what the Lord presents here about Himself, that is, that He incorporates the Father in Himself and that therefore His works manifest the Father's operation within Him. Like His disciples then, His disciples today have not really known Him according to the revelation of Himself and His works that He Himself has given here. This shortage affects not only their proper appreciation of Him, which in itself is a prime importance, but also their proper living and work as His disciples today. In this article I wish to examine three particular facets of the believers' living and work—their virtues, their walk, and their practical service—in light of the Lord's words above about Himself

in verses 7 through 11 and, particularly, about them as His believers in verse 12.

To describe both the Lord's relationship to the Father in His being and works and the believers' relationship to the Triune God in their living and service, I employ the term *incorporation*, following Witness Lee (*Issue 21-22, 24-26, 40-42*). By the term I (and Witness Lee) wish to refer to the principle that when any one of the three of the Divine Trinity acts, all three operate. In other words, when any one of the three acts, He incorporates the operation of the other two in His action. What is manifest is the action of the one, but in that manifest action there is the incorporate operation of the other two. Thus, every distinct action of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit is an incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. Even in actions that have been traditionally associated with only one of the three (for example, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ), all three are in operation in the one manifest action of the one, the one incorporating the operations of all three. Certainly, the distinctions between the three are preserved, and thus, we should rightly understand, for example, that it was the Son of God who became flesh, died for our redemption, and rose from the dead. Yet at the same time we should recognize that in what are distinctly the Son's manifest actions, the Father and the Spirit operate by the Son's incorporation of them in His being and doing. The same is true of the actions of the Father and of the Spirit.

This incorporation is prominent in the life and works of the Lord Jesus, as seen in the Gospel of John, and in the first two articles in this series on incorporation I attempted to detail the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in His earthly life and works. But this incorporation also extends beyond the earthly life and works of Christ and is evidenced frequently in Acts though Jude. In three following articles I presented what appears to be the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in the work of Christ and of the Spirit in the church, after Christ's resurrection and ascension. Then,

in another two articles I focused on this incorporation of the Triune God in the character and service of the apostles in Acts through Jude. Finally, in my previous article in this series I began to examine the incorporation of the Triune God by the common believers. Of all the instances of incorporation that I could find in Acts through Jude, those by the believers, apart from the apostles, constitute roughly half of the total (253 of 514). Thus, four articles are probably necessary to properly examine the believers' incorporation of the Triune God: in their salvation (my previous article), in their virtues, walk, and practical service (this article), in their various spiritual functions, and in their being the Body of Christ (forthcoming articles).

In what the Lord said to His disciples in John 14, there is a clear prophecy concerning the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in verse 12: "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father." The works that the Lord did are those that He describes in verse 10, and these are works of incorporation: "The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works." What was manifest to all was the speaking of the Lord Jesus, but the intrinsic significance and value of His speaking work were in the Father who abides in Him doing His works. The Lord's open speaking incorporated the Father's operation within Him, and it was this incorporation that characterized all His works. As the Lord goes on to say, the believers are to do the works that He does, and in this context that means that the believers are to incorporate the operation of God in Christ in all that they do. Indeed, the Lord even says that the believers will do works "greater than these," and were this not His own declaration, we could scarcely believe it possible. But in what happens after His death and resurrection, when He comes to the apostles and the believers as the Spirit to indwell them, we do indeed see a greater reach, a greater extent, and a greater impact on the world at large than what the Lord Jesus could have in first-century Galilee and Judea while He was in the flesh. Now having gone to the Father and being given as the Spirit, He is incorporated in the living and service of the believers throughout the ages and throughout the earth. These are certainly greater works, but they are nevertheless His works now in the believers. As He incorporated

the Father and lived and worked because of the Father, His believers incorporate Him and live and work because of Him (6:57). In what follows below I wish to present this as particularly true in the believers' virtues, walk, and practical service.

In Their General Christian Virtues

The New Testament provides numerous references to the virtues that Christians should possess, so much so that on first inspection one can easily get the impression that the Christian life is merely a living out of proper human virtues. From one perspective this is certainly not wrong, but genuine Christian virtues are not simply those that any good human being may possess. Otherwise, where is the distinction between the believers and the unbelievers? If a naturally good person could possess the same virtues without God's salvation that the Bible exhorts a Christian to exhibit, what value at all would there be in God's salvation? There can be no doubt that human beings are endowed by creation with significant virtues, and human history is brilliantly sparkled by the lives of those exceptional human beings who brought these natural, created virtues to full expression. But according to a more careful reading of the

CHRISTIAN VIRTUES ARE THE EXPRESSION OF THE TRIUNE GOD LIVING AND OPERATING IN THE BELIEVERS. WHEN THE BELIEVERS MANIFEST GENUINE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES, THEY ARE ACTUALLY INCORPORATING THE OPERATIONS OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THEIR LIVING.

New Testament, Christian virtues are more than these created virtues. Outwardly, they may seem the same, but intrinsically, they bear a different identity because, unlike created virtues, they manifest the operations of God within the believers. The portions below make it clear that Christian virtues are the expression of the Triune God living and operating in the believers. When the believers manifest genuine Christian virtues, what they are actually doing is incorporating the operations of the Triune God in their living.

The portion of Scripture that most fully lists the genuine Christian virtues ties these virtues to the operation of God the Spirit in the believers:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Paul's unique expression *the fruit of the Spirit* refers to the product of the Spirit's operation in the believers. "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, meekness, self-control” in this context are not the created virtues that we sometimes, though rarely, find in noble human beings; rather, Paul here refers to those virtues insofar as they come forth from the Spirit. Certainly we have known human beings who naturally exhibit some or all of these virtues, but that is not the point. The real value is not in the fruit but in the tree. For the believer, the real value is not merely in the virtues that he or she expresses but in the God who operates within to provide the source and reality of those virtues. What sets Christian virtue apart from natural human virtue is the God who operates within the believer as the source of virtue. Mere human virtue relies on mere human endeavor; Christian virtue relies on the believer’s incorporation of the operation of God within.

In Romans 14:17 Paul ties three capital Christian virtues to the operation of the Holy Spirit in the believers:

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17)

Here Paul sums up his foregoing description of the proper receiving of one another in the church life with the all-encompassing phrase *the kingdom of God*. The church life with the believers’ tolerance for and ready reception of one another is the reality of the kingdom of God today. External matters, even those which are matters of individual conscience (vv. 1-15), do not constitute God’s kingdom in the church. Rather, in His kingdom “righteousness and peace and joy” prevail among the believers over the variety in subjectivity of individual conscience. These virtues exist in the church because they are expressed personally in the living of the believers in the church. The believers live out righteousness, maintain peace, and express joy in their relationships in the church, and this is the reality of the kingdom of God among them. But Paul is clear in saying that these virtues, though manifested by the believers, have their source “in the Holy Spirit.” Because the Holy Spirit dwells in the believers and operates faithfully within them, their living can be filled with the virtues that make the church life the reality of the kingdom of God today. Typically, constraints of individual conscience (e.g., as here, those related to “eating and drinking”) divide people and alienate them, but in the church the operation of the Holy Spirit within the believers enables them to surpass any natural source of division while maintaining their righteousness before God, their peace toward others, and their joy personally and corporately. The believers incorporate the operation of the Holy Spirit in the church and, in doing so, bring in God’s reigning in the church and among society in general. Here we see incorporation on two levels. First, the believers incorporate the Holy Spirit’s operation within them by manifesting these

capital virtues, and second, this manifestation incorporates God’s reigning on the earth practically. It is God’s reigning actually and effectively, but it is accomplished through the believers’ incorporation of the operation of the Holy Spirit in their daily living in the church. In the one action of God’s reigning, we see the operation of the Spirit incorporated in the believers’ living.

In Colossians Paul similarly exhorts the believers to manifest the virtues necessary for the proper church life, but here he relates those virtues to the one Body as the intrinsic reality of the church and indicates that they rely on the operation of Christ in the believers.

Put on therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, inward parts of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering; bearing one another and forgiving one another, if anyone should have a complaint against anyone; even as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive. And over all these things put on love, which is the uniting bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body; and be thankful. (Col. 3:12-15)

Method here requires that I pass over the Christian virtues mentioned in verses 12 through 14, which Paul exhorts the believers to “put on.” There is no explicit mention of the operations of the Triune God within the believers in these three verses, though the actions of putting on and forgiving and the mention of inward parts imply something more than the believers’ works in and of themselves. But in verse 15 Paul explicitly speaks of the peace of Christ arbitrating in the believers’ hearts, and this is indeed an instance of the believers’ incorporating the operation of the Triune God in their Christian virtues. The peace of Christ, in that it operates in the hearts of the believers, must be the peace that Christ Himself genders within them. It is not simply a residue of His person and work in His previous ministry on the earth but His ongoing peacemaking in His heavenly ministry today. In that this peace can arbitrate, we know that Christ is operative within the believers. Christ operates, and that operation results in the experience of peace within the believers. This is not a self-made peace but a peace by divine operation; it is a peace that results from and thereby incorporates Christ’s operation in the believers. Paul exhorts the believers to let this incorporate peace arbitrate in their hearts, using a striking Greek verb (*brabeuō*) that alludes to the “umpire...whose office at the games is to direct, arbitrate and decide the contest” (*TDNT* 1: 637), and such arbitration is certainly needed among the believers if the oneness that makes the Body of Christ a reality is to be maintained. The oneness of the Body is indeed “the sphere and element in which that peace of Christ was to be carried on and realized” (*Alford* 3: 237), but at the

same time, the “one Body” is practically maintained by the peace that arbitrates in the believers’ hearts. Thus, Christ operates to generate the peace within the believers that preserves the oneness of His Body. In effect, the Body of Christ is constituted one Body through the believers’ incorporation of the operation of Christ to gender peace within and among them.

In the foregoing portions from his Epistles, Paul speaks of peace mainly as a virtue experienced by the believers in their relationships with others in the church. In the portions below he speaks of peace mainly as it relates to the believers’ standing before God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses every man’s understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:7)

Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Rom. 15:33)

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace. (Rom. 8:6)

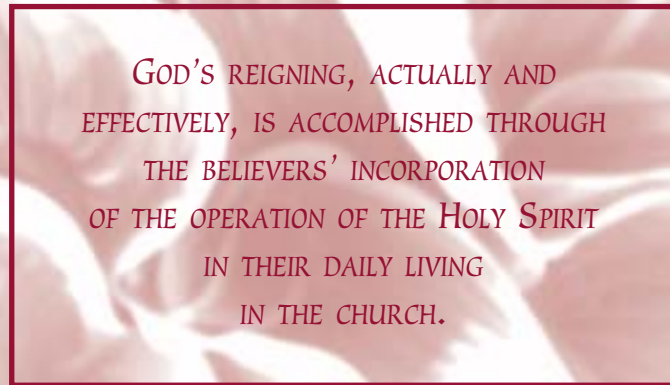
Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)

In Philippians 4:7 Paul tells the believers that the peace of God will guard their hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus. There are two aspects of incorporation in this verse. First, the believers incorporate the peace of God in their experience. As we saw above in the expression *the peace of Christ*, here *the peace of God* refers to the peace that is generated by the operation of God within the believers. Alford calls it “that peace which rests in God and is wrought by Him in the soul, the counterpoise of all troubles and anxieties” (3: 189). This is not self-made peace, for it “surpasses every man’s understanding,” but is a peace that has its source in God’s operation within the believers. Second, this incorporate peace guards the hearts of the believers “in Christ Jesus.” As is usual for this phrase, the sense is that Christ Jesus is the sphere and element of the guarding that this incorporate peace offers (3: 190). Since Christ is the mystical realm that God operates in to generate this peace within the believers, it can be said that Christ incorporates God’s operation within the believers for this peace. The peace that surpasses every

man’s understanding and guards the hearts and thoughts of the believers is a capital virtue that they incorporate in their experience through God’s operation in Christ Jesus within them.

In Romans 15:33 Paul reverses his expression and commends “the God of peace” to the believers. Whereas in Colossians 3:15 and Philippians 4:7 he focused on the peace that God in Christ produces in the believers through their incorporation of His operation within them, in Romans 15:33 he focuses on the God who produces the peace in the believers (Wallace 106). What the believers experience as peace results from the operation of God within them, and thus, they incorporate His operation within them for their peace before Him and among others. Because God is described here in so experiential a way, Paul’s commendation that He “be with you all” can hardly be interpreted as God’s mere accom-

paniment in the believers’ environment and circumstances; rather, I believe that Paul is commending to the believers their incorporation of the operation of God within them for their experience of peace. Paul offers a similar commendation in Philippians 4:9.



GOD’S REIGNING, ACTUALLY AND EFFECTIVELY, IS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH THE BELIEVERS’ INCORPORATION OF THE OPERATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THEIR DAILY LIVING IN THE CHURCH.

In Romans 8:6 Paul considers peace as the believers’ incorpo-

ration of the operation of the Spirit of life in their human spirit. “The mind set on the spirit” is the translation offered by the Recovery Version, used here, following NASB (“the mind set on the Spirit”) and closely resembling RSV and NRSV (“to set the mind on the Spirit”). *The spirit* in this context seems to be a reference to more than simply the divine Person. In contrast to the fallen flesh in the former part of this verse, the term must refer to the regenerated human spirit of the believers as indwelt by the Spirit. Paul later tells us that this “spirit is life” because Christ is in the believers (v. 10). In that this spirit is life because of Christ’s indwelling, this spirit cannot be the Spirit of God, who is life in His own existence (Lee, Recovery Version, note 5). While some may bristle at even the mention of a human spirit and thus the tripartite composition of the human being, Paul is quite clear later in this chapter in making a distinction between the divine Spirit and the human spirit of the believers (“The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit,” v. 16). Thus, a reference to the human spirit of the believers indwelt by the Spirit of God is not at all to be rejected here in verse 6. The believers incorporate this

mingled spirit by setting their mind on it and thereby letting their mind adopt and reflect the Spirit's disposition, as we may translate the Greek noun here. Such a mind incorporates what the Spirit Himself is, that is, life, as His title in verse 2 ("the Spirit of life") defines Him. The Spirit of life frees the believers from the wretchedness of the body of death that Paul laments in 7:24 by being the life that delivers them inwardly, and this deliverance is through the setting of their mind on the Spirit who dwells in their spirit, that is, through their incorporation of the Spirit of life to be their own disposition. By this incorporation of life in their disposition, the wretchedness and despair in chapter 7 of Romans resolves, and peace prevails within them. The Spirit of life in their spirit, whom they incorporate in their whole inner disposition, becomes, in effect, peace within them. Few of us have the heightened sensitivity that Paul had for the wretchedness and despair that he expresses in Romans 7, but if we do, we can have peace only if we genuinely have the life within us to overcome "the body of this death." This life is in reality the Spirit of life, but His effectiveness as such depends on our incorporation of who He is within our soul. When He as life becomes life to us inwardly, the body of this death no longer drags us down, and the ineffectiveness of the flesh is overcome. As a result, the incorporated life prevails over death, and peace results.

Later, in Romans 15:13 Paul again speaks of peace as a virtue that results from the believers' incorporation of God's operation within them. "The God of hope" is the God who produces hope within the believers (Wallace 106), and this in itself is a reference to His operation in the believers. Their genuine feeling of hope results from their incorporation of God's operation within them, not from a mere detached appreciation of God in general. But God's operation within the believers is more directly referred to in the predicate of this sentence: "fill you with all joy and peace in believing." This filling is also His operation within the believers, and through it the believers experience joy and peace. When the believers incorporate the operation of the God of hope within them, His operation fills them to the point that they experience all joy and peace in their believing what they hope for. The believers experience hope, joy, and peace as they incorporate the operation of God within them. But Paul's wish is not simply this. He goes on to express a greater desire in the second clause of this verse: that the believers would abound in hope through the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, no doubt, within them. Gordon Fee points out that to "abound in hope" is "remarkable language" when compared to Paul's more typical expressions of "'abounding' or 'overflowing' in such things as 'faith,' or 'earnestness,' or 'love' (cf. 2 Cor. 8:7)" (623). Through the Spirit's operating in power within the believers, they do not merely have hope—they abound in hope. Here

again we see that their abounding in hope results from their incorporation of the Spirit's operation in power within them. Finally, we should note that the God of hope and the Holy Spirit are not two separate Agents here, nor is filling with all joy and peace separate from the abounding in hope. These are incorporated Agents and incorporating operations. The operation of the God of hope is incorporated in the operation of the Holy Spirit in power, and the filling with all joy and peace is incorporated in the abounding in hope.

In three of the portions we have covered thus far, Paul includes joy as a manifestation of the operation of the Triune God in the believers (Gal. 5:22-23; Rom. 14:17; 15:13). Joy is that virtue that caps all other virtues. It results when all righteousness is fulfilled, when peace is achieved, and when hope prevails. In the two portions below from his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul directly ties joy to the Lord's operation within the believers.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, for me it is not irksome, but for you it is safe. (Phil. 3:1)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Phil. 4:4)

In both instances Paul exhorts the believers to have their joy, that is, to rejoice, "in the Lord." Paul is not exhorting the believers to take the Lord as the ground of their rejoicing, as a casual reading of this verse may suggest. The adverbial expression *in the Lord* (Gk. *en Kyriō*), like his more common *in Christ (Jesus)*, is a reference to Paul's deep realization of the believers' mystical incorporation into Christ that makes Christ the sphere and element of their living. Paul uses this phrase more often in Philippians than in any of his other Epistles (9 of 48 instances). Because they are now in Christ Jesus the Lord, they can do all things by His life and nature within them, and His life and nature are particularly necessary for genuine rejoicing always. When the believers genuinely rejoice always, they do so by the Lord's life and nature operating within them, and in this sense, they incorporate the Lord's operation within them for their experience of genuine joy.

Another critical virtue in the Christian life is power, and in the portions below Paul indicates that Christian power has its source in the operations of the Triune God within the believers.

For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness. (2 Tim. 1:7)

Since you seek a proof of the Christ who is speaking in me, who is not weak unto you but is powerful in you. (2 Cor. 13:3)

Finally, be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength. (Eph. 6:10)

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man. (Eph. 3:16)

To his younger co-worker Timothy, Paul offers the encouraging declaration that God has not given the believers a spirit of cowardice, which so many believers passively live by, but a spirit of power and of love and of sobermindedness. Gordon Fee is no doubt correct in rejecting the notion that *spirit* here refers to a disposition of some sort, though characterizing the English translations, which generally do not capitalize *spirit* here, as “especially faulty” (788) oversimplifies the reference. Certainly the divine Spirit is alluded to here, as Fee partially sees, but Paul is probably referring to more than simply the divine Spirit. Alford sees in this instance of *spirit* “the usage of [*pneuma*] without the article in the sense of the spirit of man dwelt in by the Spirit of God, and as the Spirit of God working in the spirit of man” (3: 370; see also Recovery Version, 2 Tim. 1:7, note 1). As the Spirit works within their regenerated spirit, the believers incorporate His operations in their living and experience as power, love, and sobermindedness. To fall short of this incorporation of power in their living is to miss the operation of the Spirit in their spirit, and for many (probably Timothy in his day was among them), this means that natural human cowardice can instead color their experience of the Spirit in their spirit.

In a previous article in this series I pointed out that in 2 Corinthians 13:3 Paul refers to the apostles’ incorporation of Christ in their service of ministry to the saints (“Apostles” 56). The apostles ministered to the saints by speaking the divine truths to them, and the real value in their speaking was in the Christ who was speaking in them. But the further point in this verse is that through the apostles’ incorporate ministry the believers incorporate Christ as power in their own living. In his ministry as an apostle, Paul incorporated the Christ who was speaking in him (cf. John 14:10), and as he ministered, this Christ operated within the believers as power for their progress in their Christian and church life. Paul not only incorporated Christ in his speaking but also relied on the believ-

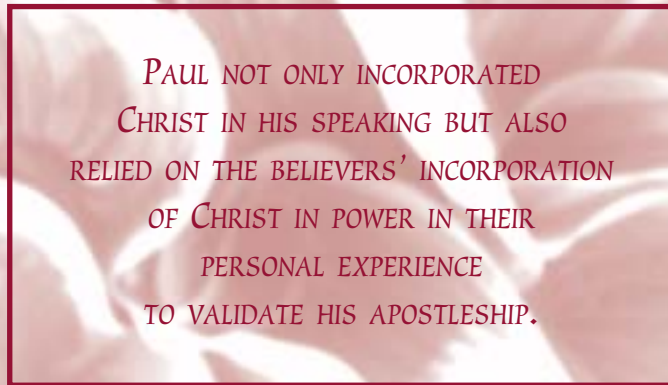
ers’ incorporation of Christ in power in their personal experience to validate his apostleship.

As we saw in his exhortation to rejoice in the Lord, in Ephesians 6:10 we see Paul exhorting the believers to experience power for their Christian and church life “in the Lord.” The same observations apply here. The Lord is not a mere basis or ground for their being empowered; rather, because the empowering is “in the Lord,” it takes the Lord as its sphere and element, and the believers experience genuine power through the operation of the Lord within their being. What operates within them as power is not their own natural human strength, which is far from adequate for the Christian and church life, but “His strength” in its manifested form, that is, in its might.

In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prays that God the Father would grant the believers, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power. This strengthening is accomplished through His Spirit, and this indicates that the Father’s operation is incorporated in the Spirit’s work. But as far as the believers are concerned, the Spirit’s work is manifested as power within them, and thus, the believers incorporate

the Spirit’s operation within them in this way. Further, the Father gives (as the Greek word can be simply translated) this strengthening according to the riches of His glory. *Glory* here is not simply “His own infinite perfections” (Alford 3: 109) viewed in themselves within God and apart from His creation but those perfections as they are expressed, and particularly so, as they are experienced and expressed by His people. “Glory is the expression of God” (Recovery Version, note 2). Hence, the Father grants the believers to be strengthened with power according to His deep desire to be expressed through His creature (cf. Gen. 1:26). Thus, the Father’s granting here is with a view to His own expression within and by the believers, and implicitly in the phrase *the riches of His glory* there is a reference to the believers’ incorporation of God for His expression through them, that is, for His glory in its abundant manifestations in them particularly.

The four portions above provide a succinct set of texts to illustrate the operations of the entire Trinity in one specific experience of the believers. As we have seen above, what the believers experience as power is variously



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described as the Father's operation, the Son's operation, and the Spirit's operation. Only a blatant tritheist would see in this three separate operations with three separate experiences of power. The reality is that the one God works within the believers according to His Triune existence to be their power for their Christian and church life. In working according to this triune existence, the three of the Divine Trinity remain distinct but always incorporate the operations of each other in all that They do within the believers. Often the writers of the New Testament indicate, even if only casually, these incorporate operations of the Triune God when they speak of the believers' experience. Such is the case in the first and fourth passages above—God and the Spirit (in the human spirit of the believers) in 2 Timothy 1:7; the Father and the Spirit in Ephesians 3:16. But even when the incorporate characteristic of the Triune God's operations is not explicitly mentioned, as is the case in the second and third passages above, the whole body of truth in the New Testament compels us to understand it implicitly nevertheless. It is always God in Christ as the Spirit who works within the believers for their Christian and church life. Further, this incorporate work of God within the believers is in turn the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God within them. Hopefully, it will become clear, through the exposition of the many passages to follow, that the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God is the real significance of the Christian and church life according to the New Testament. This is so contrary to what many of us understand about the Christian and church life, but unless it is so, the Christian life is merely an enhanced performance of natural human virtues, and the church life is merely an exceptional collection of natural human beings. Without the incorporate operations of the Triune God incorporated into the life and living of the believers, the Christian life and the church life devolve to mere human conventions, even if they surpass all other human conventions.

The last group of verses below are loosely related in that they speak of virtues that the believers need in order to stand firm in the Christian and church life.

So then the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied. (Acts 9:31)

Now the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus. (Rom. 15:5)

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ. (2 Thes. 3:5)

If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any

consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any tenderheartedness and compassions. (Phil. 2:1)

For we by the Spirit out of faith eagerly await the hope of righteousness. (Gal. 5:5)

So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, in the same way stand firm in the Lord, beloved. (Phil. 4:1)

As the early church progressed, the believers increasingly experienced persecution from the Jewish religionists around them (Acts 4:1—8:3). Yet the Lord's move continued to spread and prevail (8:4—9:30), and the church was multiplied (9:31). In the face of these persecutions and new challenges, the believers inwardly experienced the operation of the Holy Spirit as comfort to them. The Greek word here, *paraklēsis*, offers a range of possible meanings in the context. "Comfort" is probably the best translation, but other shades of meaning may also be involved, including consolation and encouragement. The Spirit in the believers was actively operating to console them in their persecutions and to encourage them to look beyond their trying circumstances. This operation provided genuine comfort to them, and their experience of this comfort came about only through their incorporation in their daily lives of the Holy Spirit's operation within them.

In Romans 15:5 Paul calls God "the God of endurance and encouragement," and like the similar appellatives *the God of hope* and *the God of peace* that we examined above, this one refers to God's operation in the believers to generate endurance and encouragement. Endurance and encouragement as virtues are not simply inspired by God outwardly; they result from God's indwelling and moving in the believers. The believers' experience of God within them variously results in the virtues needed for the Christian and church life—here endurance and encouragement—and their experience makes God the God of these virtues in effect. By incorporating God's operation within them in their particular circumstances, the believers manifest God's attributes in the particular virtues that they as His believers need for these circumstances. God as the God of endurance and encouragement (and elsewhere as the God of hope, the God of peace, the God of love, and the God of all grace) is made manifest and is known experientially through the incorporation of His attributes by the believers in their living. Further, in the previous context of this verse there is also practical help for the believers' experience of the God of endurance and encouragement: "For the things that were written previously were written for our instruction, in order that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (v. 4). Taken together, these two verses indicate that God

operates through His Scriptures to generate the endurance and encouragement that the believers experience and to manifest Himself as this kind of God experientially. There can hardly be a believer who has not experienced these precious effects from the Scriptures, but some believers may not fully realize what is actually going on within their experience. As they touch the Bible in a seeking way, what is written (by God, I should say) gives the indwelling God the way to operate within them and to generate endurance and encouragement according to what is written. The endurance and the encouragement that the believers experience are not natural human virtues that are stirred up by the Scriptures or inspired by some contemplation of God; rather, they are virtues that reflect the attributes of the indwelling God who operates within the believers and that the believers incorporate in their living.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul relates the virtue of endurance to Christ, calling it “the endurance of Christ” Himself. The expression should first refer to the endurance that Christ showed in His own human living (as Alford 3: 296), but we should not understand it as simply that, for Paul prays that the Lord would direct the hearts of the believers into this endurance as their own experience. We should not minimize the experience of endurance here to a mere reflection of a pattern found in the life of Christ. Rather, taking the indwelling of Christ as our basis (cf. Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27), we should understand that Christ operates within the believers to give them endurance in all their circumstances. In this sense, He endures within them, and they incorporate His endurance in their living and make it their virtue. Christ operates within them, and they “participate in the endurance of Christ that [they] may endure sufferings, as He did, to stand against Satan, the enemy of God” (Recovery Version, 2 Thes. 3:5, note 5).

In Philippians 2:1 Paul calls attention to five excellent virtues for the Christian and church life: encouragement, consolation, fellowship, tenderheartedness, and compassions. It is not easy to decide who, in Paul’s mind, is bearing these virtues for his purposes—he as the apostle and for his ministry, or the Philippians as his audience and with a positive response to his ministry—but I believe that it is much like Paul to look to the believers to be his encouragement for his ministry (cf. 4:1; 1 Thes. 2:19;

2 Thes. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:14), and hence, it seems that Paul is looking to them here to make his joy full (v. 2) based on his hope in these excellent virtues among them. Two of these virtues he ties to the Triune God—encouragement in Christ and fellowship of spirit. “Encouragement in Christ” is not a kind of encouragement based on Christ’s being the outward object of the believers’ hope; Paul’s use of his signature phrase *en Xristō* precludes that. Instead, as always when he uses the phrase, Paul here is speaking of an experience that the believers derive from being in Christ, that is, from taking Christ as the sphere and element of their Christian and church life. Because Christ is within them, the believers are able to take His operation within them as their encouragement. In *fellowship of spirit* there is again an implicit reference to the Spirit, since the Spirit dwells in the regenerated spirit of the believers, as we saw in Romans 8:6. Thus, we should understand in this phrase a reference to the Spirit’s operation

within the believers through their human spirit, which He has regenerated and indwells, and further, that the fellowship that they experience results from their incorporation of His operation within them. But what exactly is this “fellowship of spirit”? If we understand an implicit reference to the Spirit in the phrase, we immediately notice the similarity to the phrase

WITHOUT THE INCORPORATE OPERATIONS OF THE TRIUNE GOD INCORPORATED INTO THE LIFE AND LIVING OF THE BELIEVERS, THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE CHURCH LIFE DEVOLVE TO MERE HUMAN CONVENTIONS, EVEN IF THEY SURPASS ALL OTHER HUMAN CONVENTIONS.

at the end of 2 Corinthians: *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* (13:14). There is probably some commonality in meaning in these two instances, but the expression in 2 Corinthians probably refers more to the Spirit’s function in the economy of the Divine Trinity to be the communication (as the Greek word *koinōnia* may be rendered) of the grace of Christ with the love of God to the believers. In Philippians, where Paul uses *koinōnia* more than in any other Epistle, the sense of the word, apart from the instance in question here, points more to the believers’ holding something in common with either Paul (1:5; 4:14, 15) or Christ (3:10). Since the fellowship in 2:1 is “of spirit” and therefore implicitly of the Spirit, it is something that results from the Spirit’s operation, but, in line with his other uses in this Epistle, it must refer to what the believers can hold in common with Paul, albeit through the Spirit’s operation in their spirit. We can reasonably expect that Paul has the other instances of *koinōnia* in this short Epistle in mind when he mentions it here—the fellowship unto the gospel (1:5) and the fellowship with him in his affliction (4:14) and in the account of giving and receiving (4:15). If that is the case,

the fellowship here, generalized for the sake of his appeal to the Philippians (and perhaps for the rhetorical force of his appeal), refers to what the believers hold in common with Paul for the progress of God's move on the earth. If there is any fellowship of the kinds that he has experienced with the Philippians—in furtherance of the gospel, in affliction, in giving—this should be called upon by them to fulfill his high request in the following clause (v. 2). But what is striking here is that Paul understands that this fellowship, this commonality, of the believers with him, which he calls upon for his high request, is “of spirit,” that is, dependent upon the operation of the Spirit who dwells in the spirit of the believers. Their fellowship with him, which is needed for the fulfillment of his request in the next clause, is spiritual, in the radical sense of the word, being the incorporation of the Spirit's operation within them.

In order to stand firm in the Christian and church life, the believers hold to hope. That hope is variously expressed in the Epistles, and in Galatians 5:5 it is tied to the operation of the Spirit in the believers. “The hope of righteousness” is “the hope whose object is perfect righteousness” (Alford 3: 53), and that perfect righteousness can be none other than Christ Himself (Recovery Version, Gal. 5:5, note 3). Since this righteousness is something that the believers hope for and eagerly await, it cannot be merely the initial righteousness that justifies them before God (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 3:26) but should refer more precisely to the subjective righteousness that the believers express by living out the indwelling Christ (Phil. 3:9; 1:21). Here is a reference to the believers' incorporation of Christ within them, though the text does not implicitly mention Him. Rather, Paul explicitly mentions the Spirit. It is by the Spirit's operation within the believers that they eagerly await the manifestation of what they hope for—Christ as the reality of their subjective righteousness. For the believers to eagerly await this hope is for them to express this hope in their living, and that expression is not something that they work up in themselves but comes “by the Spirit” who indwells them. As the Spirit works within the believers, hope in Christ as their subjective righteousness is generated and expressed by them, and their eager anticipation of this hope turns out to be their incorporation of the Spirit's operation within them.

In his Epistle to the Philippians Paul begins his extended conclusion with the exhortation to “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1). As we saw above in the discussion on Philippians 4:4, the phrase *in the Lord* (Gk. *en Kyriō*) does not denote the Lord as the ground of their standing firm but, as Alford notes, the Lord “as the element wherein [their] steadfastness consists” (3: 187). Their steadfastness is not something of themselves nor simply something inspired by their appreciation of the Lord; it is the Lord

Himself within them making them steadfast in their Christian and church life. By their incorporation of the operation of Christ Jesus as Lord within them, they are able to be steadfast, to stand firm, in all environments and under all circumstances, particularly those among themselves within the church, which is chief on Paul's mind in this conclusion.

In the foregoing nineteen portions from Scripture all the Christian virtues referred to come forth from the various operations of the Triune God within the believers. My intention in examining these portions is to hopefully demonstrate that genuine Christian virtues are not merely human virtues, which are available to even unre-generated human beings. While Paul does not emphasize the point, he does repeatedly qualify his references to these virtues, almost casually, with the phrases *of God, of Christ, in the Lord, of the Spirit, in the Holy Spirit, through His Spirit, by the Spirit*, and of *s/Spirit*. Further, he sometimes even characterizes God in terms of these virtues, referring to Him as the God of peace, the God of hope, the God of endurance, and the *s/Spirit* of power and of love and of sobermindedness. These qualifiers reflect, I believe, Paul's realization that genuine Christian virtues issue from the God who dwells within the believers as a result of their regeneration by Him. This understanding may seem foreign to many believers, but without it, it is difficult to account for Paul's repeated qualification. Certainly we could take all these qualifiers as metaphorical references to Christ in His existence external to the believers, and certain theologies today would naturally force that understanding upon us. But it is difficult to deny that Paul truly believed that God dwells in the believers by virtue of His triune existence, and this belief strongly permeates the language of his Epistles. Often it is as though he cannot avoid a reference to the operation of God when speaking of the believers' experiences, and it seems that at least in the back of his mind is the realization that what the believers experience derives from that operation. The repeated qualifications to these virtues strongly suggest that Paul viewed Christian virtue as more than simple human virtue and saw in it God's indwelling work within the believers and expressed through their living. What was manifested in their living was the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God as their many Christian virtues. Of course, Paul does not always qualify his references to Christian virtue in this way, but he does so with sufficient frequency to convince us that his fuller understanding of the matter encompasses this notion of the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God.

In Their Love for the Lord and His Believers

In Paul's catalog of virtues in Galatians 5:22-23, which we

considered at the beginning of this article, the first virtue listed is love. Elsewhere Paul recommends love as the greatest of virtues and as the most excellent way for the Christian and church life (1 Cor. 12:31; 13:13). His extended encomium on love in 1 Corinthians 13 shows the preeminence of this virtue in his thinking. Because of this preeminence, we should give special attention to love in our consideration of the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. Paul and John often speak of love in relation to the operations of the Triune God within the believers, and as we will see below, this love is directed variously toward the Lord and His believers.

And we know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16)

No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:12)

But whoever keeps His word, truly in this one the love of God has been perfected. In this we know that we are in Him. (1 John 2:5)

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15)

Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 21)

And hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:5)

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance of Christ. (2 Thes. 3:5)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor. 13:14)

The verses above speak of the love of God as expressed in the believers' living. This is something that John emphasizes in his first Epistle. Love, according to John, is not simply an expressed virtue but, more importantly, God Himself: "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Like Alford, we probably need to pass over "the theological

import of this weighty and wonderful sentence," but we should also "put in a caution against all inadequate and shallow explanations of the saying" (commenting on 4:8, 4: 489). John here is not referring to love as something to be ascribed to God as one of His attributes. In other words, John is not simply saying that God is loving or even all-loving. Rather, he is speaking of God predicatively and identifying love as God Himself. Thus, in the believers, when love is present and expressed, it is actually God Himself who is present and expressed. Although God exists transcendentally as love in His Divine Trinity, as far as the believers' experience is concerned, love is the incorporation of God Himself in the believers' living. John further says that "he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him." Abiding is also a prominent notion in John's writings and refers to taking God (or Christ—John 15:4-7) as the sphere and element of one's living. It is "a stronger form of the Pauline *en Xristō*" (TDNT 4: 576),

which, we have seen, indicates the believers' incorporation of the operation of Christ. Both forms of abiding here ("he...abides in God" and "God abides in him") have this meaning, but the latter one is more directly a reference to God's operation in the believers. God's abiding in the believers is not merely His static indwelling within

them but more fully His living and moving within them. This understanding of love as God living and operating within the believers should inform all other references to the love of God, particularly in the writings of John.

The particular problem with the phrases *the love of God*, *His love*, and *the love of the Father* (literally in 1 John 2:15) is their ambiguity. Do they refer to our love for God (the objective genitive in Greek) or God's love directed to some other implied object (the subjective genitive)? Many commentators choose one or the other, and in some contexts both meanings make good sense. That may be an indication that both meanings are correct and that both are to be understood, and some commentators opt for this view. In this sense, "*the love of God* denotes our love toward God, which is generated by His love within us" (Recovery Version, v. 5, note 2). In view of what we have seen regarding John's understanding of love—that "God is love"—it seems best to take these phrases with fuller import. And if that is the case, the believers' experience of love is an incorporation of God as love operating within them.

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In 1 John 4:12 love and God's abiding within the believers are again mentioned. John first declares that "no one has beheld God at any time," meaning that God cannot be perceived by the natural senses. But what He is in His essence, that is, love, can be experienced by the believers, and when they experience Him as their love toward one another, God is perceived. The love that the believers have for one another is not a mere human emotion, fickle and unreliable as it may be, but the operation of the eternal God abiding within them. What He is as love has been first manifested in His sending of His only begotten Son into the world as a propitiation for sins that His chosen ones might have life and live through Christ (vv. 9-10); but what He is as love should in turn be perfected and completed within His regenerated believers by their living Him out as their love toward one another (Alford 4: 490; Recovery Version, v. 12, note 3). Thus, in 1 John 4:12 the phrase *His love* appears to refer to God as love dwelling and operating within the believers as the source of their love toward one another. By incorporating the indwelling God, the believers are able to love one another with His love and to thereby allow Him to bring His love to its fullest and most complete realization among them.

In 1 John 2:5 the phrase *the love of God* in Greek seems to be more an objective genitive than a subjective genitive; that is, in this context it appears to refer to the believers' love for God. But again, the full meaning of the phrase here is influenced by John's deeper understanding that God is love, and thus, the love that the believers have *for* God is generated by the love that *is* God. Their love for God is not of themselves but rather incorporates God as love, who dwells within. The believers' love for God is brought to its most complete state ("has been perfected") when it can be said that they keep His word. Here *His word* refers in total to the commandments in verses 3 and 4, which are not, of course, the Old Testament precepts in commandments but Christ's injunctions in the New Testament dispensation, the chief of which is in John 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Unlike the totality of the Old Testament law, "His word" can be kept by His believers because they have Him dwelling within and, hence, they are able to incorporate Him for their keeping of His word. For John it is by these matters—keeping Christ's word and therefore having the love of God perfected within—that "we know that we are in Him." In referring to the mystical union of the believers with and in Christ, John makes clear that the believers carry out these intrinsic matters not by their own virtue but by taking Christ as the sphere and element of their Christian and church life. They are able to keep His word and to thus have the love of God perfected in them because they live "in Him," drawing from Him as the operation of divine grace for their living. In other words, they incorporate Him as the source of their Christian and church life.

Later in chapter 2 John speaks of the "love for the Father" (v. 15), and this translation of the Greek phrase, which is literally the "love of the Father," points again to an objective genitive. But again the dual sense of the genitive should not be lost, and we should understand that the love for the Father comes out of what He is as love within us. "To love Him with such a love is to love Him with the love with which He has loved us and which is enjoyed by us" (Recovery Version, note 3). As always in John's first Epistle, the believers' virtues in their Christian and church life are not offered as proofs that they love God; rather, they manifest what He is as love within them. In 2:15 John is not saying that the believers should not love the world if they really intend to love the Father. Rather, he is pointing out the simple fact that when someone loves the world, he or she is not living out the love of the Father, both as love and as the object of his or her love, from within. In so saying, he implies that the believers can experience the Father as love within them to the extent that their love now is directed fully toward Him and not toward the world. Their love for the Father incorporates Him as love within and extinguishes all other lower loves that naturally stem from the unregenerated human nature.

Jude also speaks of the love of God in its subjective sense, that is, in the sense of God's love within them. In exhorting the believers to keep themselves in this love, Jude is no doubt speaking of their sustained experience and enjoyment of God's love within them to be the source and motivation of their own love. To keep themselves in the love of God is to incorporate the love of God in their experience for their living.

Turning now to Paul's use of the phrase *the love of God*, which occurs four times in his writings, we find three instances that probably refer to the believers' incorporation of God's operations. (*The love of God* in Romans 8:39 as well as *the love of Christ* in 8:35 do not seem to offer direct references to incorporation.) In Romans 5:5 Paul tells us that the love of God has been poured out in the believers' hearts through the Holy Spirit. Here *the love of God* cannot be taken objectively but rather refers to God as love operating through the Holy Spirit within the hearts of the believers. There are two layers of incorporation here. First, as I have noted in an earlier article, the Spirit incorporates God in His love within the believers and causes them to have overcoming hope in what God does within them ("Spirit's Incorporation of the Operations of God" 62). But further, it should be noted that since this happens within the believers' hearts, it is therefore something that they genuinely experience and live out. The love of God that works through the Spirit's operation within them is certainly perceived and deeply felt by the believers, and this love of God generates in them a hope in His full salvation, which will not ever

shame the believers, even in their most dire tribulations (vv. 3-4). Their hope stems not from their own trust and expectation but is the incorporation of God's love, which flows in them through the Spirit's incorporation of the Triune God within them.

We examined 2 Thessalonians 3:5 earlier in relation to the expression *the endurance of Christ*. Now we want to consider *the love of God* in this verse. The Greek phrase is probably an objective genitive, referring to the believers' love for God (Alford 3: 295, though he probably has inadvertently reversed the adjectives *subjective* and *objective*, compared to his other uses of them, e.g., on 1 John 2:5, 4: 435). But as we saw with John's use of the same phrase, we cannot ignore Paul's deeper understanding of the love of God, particularly as he expresses it in Romans 5:5. God's love has been poured out in the hearts of the believers and is indeed operative through the Holy Spirit. As we saw with John, we should expect that Paul understood that this love of God becomes the motivating energy within the believers for them to love Him in return (Recovery Version, note 1). His wish that the believers' hearts would be directed into the love of God is a wish for them to experience God as love operating within them and gener-

ating within them a reciprocating love for God. This experience of love for God, then, turns out to be the believers' incorporation of the God of love who indwells them. Further, that the Lord is the One who directs their hearts into this experience means that He is within them operating to this end, and here again we see Christ's incorporation of God for the believers' experience of love. In Romans 5:5 the believers are said to experience the love of God "through the Holy Spirit"; here in 2 Thessalonians 3:5 it is "the Lord" who directs their experience. These two portions show that Paul understood that the believers' experience of the love of God is the result of their incorporation of the operations of the Triune God, the Lord Jesus operating as the Holy Spirit within the hearts of the believers to direct the love of God as the source of love toward God as the object of love. To love God is to incorporate the operations of the Triune God as source, direction, channel, and object.

The third instance of the phrase *the love of God* that refers to believers' incorporation of God's operations is in 2 Corinthians 13:14. The expression in Greek is no doubt

a subjective genitive, denoting God as love within the believers. The strict but elegant parallelism of the verse requires it. This is not the believers' love for God but, like "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" and "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit," the love that is God Himself. Paul's final blessing to the Corinthians was that this love would be with them all. Paul's hope was that the Corinthians would experience God as this love inwardly in their Christian and church life. To do so is to incorporate in their living the God who dwells within them as love. We should also notice that though the parallelism among the three subject phrases here is coordinate, there is no separation between the grace, the love, and the fellowship in the experience of the believers, just as there is no separation between Christ, the Father God, and the Spirit in the Divine Trinity. The love of God is the source of the grace of Christ, which is transmitted to the believers as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (Recovery Version, note 1).

As far as the believers are concerned, these three matters constitute one experience of God. It is not that at times the believers experience grace, and at other times, love, and then at other times, fellowship. Instead, these three matters are aspects of their one experience and, I would dare say, their one experience at all times. The grace of Christ is what strikes them as the

character and quality of their experience, its identity and element, so to speak. But the grace of Christ that they experience is communicated to them through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that is, through the operation of the Holy Spirit to transmit and apply this grace to them inwardly. And the fellowship of the grace is the actual manifestation of the love of God within them; it incorporates the love of God within the believers for their experience. There is no better portion in Scripture to show the incorporate operations of the three of the Divine Trinity in the experience of the believers, and as Witness Lee notes, it is "strong proof that the trinity of the Godhead is not for the doctrinal understanding of systematic theology but for the dispensing of God Himself in His Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people" (Note 1). Finally, in their experience of this fellowship of grace with love, the believers themselves incorporate the operations of the Triune God. Paul's blessing expresses his weighty hope that the believers would experience these matters, not just know about them or acknowledge them or admire them. When the fellowship of the Holy Spirit brings the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as the expression of the love

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of God into the believers' experience in their daily Christian and church life, the believers attain to the high peak of incorporating the operations of the Divine Trinity in their normal daily living. This is indeed a very wonderful though a very normal thing for them.

In all the portions above we have seen love as a virtue of the believers through their incorporation of God's operation as love within them. A few of these mention the operation of the Holy Spirit as well (Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 13:14) but not in the sense of His direct operation for the generating of love within the believers. In the portions below we see that Paul sometimes ties love to the operation of the Spirit directly.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness. (2 Tim. 1:7)

Now I exhort you, brothers, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf. (Rom. 15:30)

Who also has made known to us your love in the Spirit. (Col. 1:8)

For Paul the highest virtue that manifests itself through the Spirit's operation within the believers is love. Here he calls it a fruit of the Spirit, indicating that it is the organic outflow of the Spirit's operation within the believers. Unlike mere works, love as a fruit of the Spirit is full of life (Recovery Version, Gal. 5:22, note 1) and has an "abiding result" (Alford 3: 59). Love as this highest virtue in the believers' Christian and church life results from their incorporation of the Spirit of life's operation within them.

The Spirit's operation to generate love within the believers is also indicated by Paul's phrase *a spirit...of love* (2 Tim. 1:7). We examined this verse earlier in the context of the believers' general virtues and specifically their power, and little more can be said here. But we should remember that *spirit* is used here without the definite article in Greek "in the sense of the spirit of man dwelt in by the Spirit of God, and as the Spirit of God working in the spirit of man" (Alford 3: 370; see also Recovery Version, note 1). As we saw with the phrase *a spirit...of power*, here we see the Spirit working within the spirit of the regenerated believers who incorporate His operations as love in their living and experience.

Before closing his Epistle to them, Paul gave the saints in

Rome a weighty charge through the Lord Jesus Christ and "through the love of the Spirit" that they would pray with him for safety in his service to the saints in Jerusalem and for his coming to Rome, which he greatly longed for (1:11). This is the only occurrence of the phrase *the love of the Spirit*, and Gordon Fee, following a number of commentators, glosses it this way: "on the basis of the love for all the saints, including myself, that the Spirit engenders" (633). Paul was counting on the Spirit's operation within the saints in Rome to engender love for him and all the saints, particularly those in Jerusalem, and this love was to become manifest in their struggling with him in their prayer to God on his behalf. The thought is quite deep. His exhortation is based on his conviction that the saints can and do incorporate the operation of the Spirit to generate love in their hearts for him as the "deacon" of this service (Gk. *diakonia*, v. 31) and for the saints in Jerusalem as the recipients of this service. Their resultant prayers manifest this incorporation openly and even audibly.

Somewhat akin to Paul's phrase *the love of the Spirit* is his expression *your love in the Spirit* in Colossians 1:8. There is divided opinion about the intended object of the phrase *your love*. Some see here a shortened repetition of the *love which you have unto all the saints* in verse 4, but others take Paul as the particular object of the Colossians' love, no doubt in view of their love for all the saints. The immediate context of verse 8 favors the latter view: Epaphras, who is probably the source of the report in verse 4, has made known something additional to Paul and Timothy, the love that the Colossians have for them as well. This love, Paul says, is "in the Spirit," and by this phrase he means not merely location but more fully instrumentality: "That is, it is not so much that by their being 'in Spirit' love flows out toward him—although one could scarcely argue against that theologically—but that the Spirit is the specific source or cause of such love, the one who has brought it to pass" (Fee 639). Again, the operation of the Spirit within the believers is directly referenced here, and through that operation the believers experience love as the leading virtue of the Christian and church life. Their love is the incorporation of the operation of the Spirit who dwells within them.

In the New Testament, love is not ascribed to the Son for its source in the believers' experience. Rather, as we have seen above, love is generally said to be "of God" or "of the Father" and, less frequently, "of the Spirit." But in the portions below the Son is nevertheless associated with love, though not as its source. Instead, He is presented as the sphere in which love is experienced by the believers. (In this article on the believers' incorporation of the Triune God, I must deliberately pass over the phrase *the love of Christ*, which occurs three times in Paul's writings as objective genitives, i.e., as Christ's love for us—Rom. 8:35; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:19).

Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you but an old commandment, which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you heard. Yet again a new commandment I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. (1 John 2:7-8)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but faith avails, operating through love. (Gal. 5:6)

In 1 John 2:7, John tells his readers that what he is writing to them is not a new commandment but the old one, which they have had from the beginning of their Christian walk. This “old commandment” is what the Lord Jesus called “a new commandment” in John 13:34, “that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another,” as the context of 2:3-11 makes clear. John’s bringing this commandment to their remembrance is not a writing of a new commandment but of an old one. Then, in the next verse he comments more deeply on what he is doing in writing to them. From another perspective, “a new commandment,” he says, “I am writing to you” (v. 8); that is, the old commandment is in another sense a new commandment. The old commandment is also a new commandment because it is “true in Him and in you.” (Because of the gender of the Greek relative pronoun, *which* in verse 8 refers not to *commandment* but to the fact that the old commandment is also a new one—Alford 4: 437-438) Thus, the commandment is old because it is the same commandment that the Lord gave to the believers at the beginning of the new age of His ministry. But the commandment is always new for the believers because it is true in Him and in them. *In Him* should not be taken to mean “in the case of Christ” and as a reference to what He did in His earthly life (as Alford 4: 438). The commandment has its authority by virtue of its age—that is, it is old—because He uttered it in His earthly ministry, but the commandment has its ongoing vitality—that is, it is new—because the believers are now “in Him” (cf. vv. 6-7). “He not only gave it to His believers but also renews it in their daily walk continually” (Recovery Version, v. 8, note 2) by their being in Him. Because the believers are “in Him,” the commandment is experientially new in them, as the words *and in you* indicate. The simple paratactic

construction of *in Him* and *in you* points to the believers’ incorporation of Christ in their expression of love toward one another: *in Him* refers to Him as the sphere and element of their Christian and church life and as the One who makes the commandment new through His operation within them; *in you* refers to the believers in their experience of loving one another through His operation within them, by which also He makes the long-standing commandment a new and vital one experientially.

In Galatians 5:6 Paul tell his readers that “in Christ Jesus...faith avails, operating through love.” Again, Paul’s signature expression *in Christ Jesus* refers to Christ as the sphere and element of the believers’ Christian existence, from whom they draw their supply by His operation within them. As always when applied to their experience, the expression points to the believers’ incorporation of Christ’s operation within them. Here particularly, that incorporation

takes the form of faith operating through love. By being in Christ, the believers draw on His operation within, and their faith as their deep appreciation for and trust in Christ operates to fulfill the law through love, as mentioned in 5:13-14. *Love* here, however, need not be limited in its scope to what the believers have for one another as fulfillment of the whole

law but should also be taken to include what the believers have for the Lord inwardly, which causes faith to operate within them. In both senses, faith operates through love. If this is correct, the believers’ love for Christ causes faith to operate, and this faith operates through their love for one another. This composite operation is incorporated in the Christian and church life of the believers.

Based on the foregoing, we see that love is associated with each of the three of the Divine Trinity, though the basis of association for each is distinct. Love is “of God” and “of the Father,” and by these expressions we understand that God the Father is the source of love. Even when Paul speaks uniquely of “the love of the Spirit” (Rom. 15:30), he is probably doing so not with direct reference to the Spirit as the source of love but with reference to Him as the incorporation of God the Father as the source of love in the believers’ experience. In this sense, God the Spirit is the very communication, the very transmission, of the love of God the Father. Further, the Son is the mystical realm in which the Spirit’s incorporation of the love of the Father takes place. All the believers are in

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Him, and He as the Beloved of the Father, that is, as the full object of the Father's love, provides them a way to have the same experience and enjoyment of the Father's love through the Spirit (Eph. 1:3-6). The believers' experience of the love of God is thoroughly their incorporation of the distinct operations of the three of the Divine Trinity, though admittedly few believers see this as well as Paul and John express it. Like the three of the Trinity, the believers' experience of love bears distinctions of operations without separation of action and person. This should not be surprising, for in understanding that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), we should perceive the full identity and operations of the Triune God—the Father who loves as the source, the Son who is loved as the object, and the Spirit who is the love borne among them as the essence. As They are in Their eternal and immanent hypostases, distinct but never separate, so They are when experienced by the believers as love with its divine source, its divine object, and its divine essence and transmission. The great privilege for, as well as the great commandment to, the believers is to incorporate the operations of the Divine Trinity, who is love, in their Christian and church life and so express Him to all the world (cf. John 17:23).

In Their General Walk

Most Christians are familiar with the notion of a Christian walk and understand it to be the way that a believer should conduct his or her Christian life according to God. This notion, of course, comes from the Bible (actually, it is primarily biblical and not secular), and both the Old Testament and New Testament provide ample examples of this use of the word *walk*. It is probably safe to say that many Christians understand their Christian walk as a kind of behavioral conformity to an external standard of Christian ethics, morality, and spirituality, and a very high standard, at that. But the portions below will hopefully show that in the mind of the apostles, particularly Paul and John, the Christian walk is more than conformity to an external standard; rather, it is motivated by the operation of the Triune God within the believers. In other words, it is the believers' incorporation of His operation within them.

But I say, Walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Gal. 5:25)

As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the Lord, walk in Him. (Col. 2:6)

For we are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand in order that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked. (1 John 2:6)

Paul exhorts, or we should say, commands, the believers to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). In light of all his Epistles, we can easily agree with others that this imperative expresses Paul's basic notion concerning the Christian life (cf. Fee 429, esp. note 214). The Christian walk is "by the Spirit," and necessarily this means that it is motivated by God within the believers, as usually (though not always) in the New Testament the Spirit is understood to be within the believers and not external to them. In Greek there is no preposition before *pneumati* ('Spirit'); instead, Paul simply offers the noun in the dative case, and this makes the sense of the modification ambiguous, as is usually the case when the simple dative case is used without a preposition. It can be understood either as instrumental or as locative of sphere, and that is why some translations render it "by the Spirit," and others, "in the Spirit." Fee "would argue more for an overlap in Pauline usage than for rigid grammatical categories. That is, even though one is to walk by means of the Spirit, ones does so because one is also to walk in the sphere of the Spirit, that is, in the arena of the Spirit's present life and activity" (430). Thus, the Spirit within the believers is living and moving, and the believers should walk, that is, have their Christian and church life, through this operation of the Spirit within them. Rather than reflecting some external system of ethics, morality, and spirituality, the Christian walk should be an incorporation of the Spirit's living and operating within the believers.

Later in the same chapter, Paul exhorts (this time he does not command) the believers in this way: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (v. 25). Unfortunately, the English translations have no way to adequately express the difference in the two Greek words for *walk* in verses 16 and 25, and because of that, a false connection between the two walks can easily be made. Although the two notions are certainly connected, it is probably the case that in Greek *walk* in verse 16 is more closely related semantically to *live* in verse 25, since the former refers to the general living of the believers. The Greek word for *walk* in verse 25 refers more to staying in rank or step with something (*TDNT* 7: 667-668) and thus emphasizes not a general living, as does the word in verse 16, but an adherence to some rule or principle for a deliberate purpose or goal. In essence, in verse 25 Paul is saying, "If we walk by and in the Spirit, as I have commanded you above, let us even further adhere to the Spirit as the rule and goal for our Christian and church life." The negative exhortation in verse 26 ("Let us not become vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another") provides the negative alternative to this adherence and, interestingly, is related to the church life of the believers rather than to their individual Christian life, thus indicating

that *walk* in verse 25 is not related so much to their general Christian life as it is to their corporate testimony in the church, i.e., to the goal of God's economy with and through them. Again, the Spirit here is not someone external to the believers but the One who lives and moves within them and who provides the rule or principle of their more deliberate walk for the accomplishment of God's economy. For this second walk, for this disciplined and deliberate walk, the believers must take the Spirit as their rule and principle. All is in place within the believers for this deliberate and regulated walk: they have the Spirit as their inward life and can therefore live by and in the Spirit, who is living and moving within them, but more importantly for the accomplishment of God's purpose, they have the Spirit within them as their operating principle, particularly for the church life. When they live out the Spirit's operation within them as the principle of their living and service, God accomplishes His economy through them in the church. Their living out of the Spirit's operation within them is their incorporation of the Spirit both as their general living and walk (v. 16) and as their deliberate adherence to the goal of God's economy (v. 25).

In Colossians 2:6 Paul commands the believers to walk in the Christ, Jesus the Lord. Once again he employs a variant of his signature grammatical construction *in Christ*, indicating that the Christian walk should find its source, element, and sphere in the Christ who lives in them. The believers have received this Christ not in the way of mental assent but in the way of opening to and accepting His indwelling by faith. August Bisping offers this comment on the matter:

Notice that Paul here says, [*you have received the Christ*], and not [*you have received the word of the Christ*]. True faith is a spiritual communion: for in faith we receive not only the doctrine of Christ, but Himself, into us: in faith He Himself dwells in us. (quoted in Alford, 3: 217)

How the believers should walk in Christ is based on how they have already received Him into them, that is, by faith. Because Christ now dwells within them by faith, the believers have the genuine way to carry out their Christian and church life through His indwelling by faith. Their walking in Him is their living out of Him whom they have received and who now indwells them. Thus, their walk incorporates His indwelling.

In a third place, Ephesians 2:10, Paul speaks of the Christian walk as something that derives from the operation of God within the believers, though the thought is not as direct as in the other two places. Paul tells the Ephesians that the believers as the church are the masterwork of God because they have been newly created to be such in Christ Jesus. (The Greek participle translated "created" refers clearly to the subject *we* in this sentence.) But he adds to this the point that the believers have been created in Christ Jesus "for good works." It is very easy to understand the good works here in a superficial way and, even worse, to be distracted by the long-standing controversy over faith and works. But something deeper must be meant, because Paul here indicates that the good works issue from the believers being created in Christ Jesus. The good works he speaks of depend on the believers being newly created in Christ Jesus and thus are not simply good deeds that they may do on their

own, independently of Christ; rather, the good works must manifest and continue God's work of new creation that is in Christ Jesus. The believers manifest these good works by living out God's work of new creation in Christ who dwells within them. Further, Paul says that these good works, according to and depending on God's work of new creation in

Christ, have been prepared by Him for the believers to walk in, that is, for them to live out as their continual mode of life. The believers live out God's work of new creation in Christ Jesus by accomplishing the good works that have been prepared by God from eternity past for this purpose. Paul does not explain precisely what these good works are, probably because he believed that his readers would understand the reference without explanation. It is not likely that the good works are simply Christian charities, as we may commonly understand; rather, these good works "must be the doing of His will that we may live the church life and bear the testimony of Jesus, as revealed in the succeeding chapters of this book" (Recovery Version, note 3). Paul's thought here is quite profound. God, through His work in Christ Jesus, has created the believers to be His masterwork, and His intention is that His work would continue in the walk of the believers, not in a common way according to our natural concept but in the same principle of new creation in Christ Jesus. The believers' good works, long prepared by God, should manifest and continue God's work of new creation in Christ Jesus, and this they do by living out the

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operation of Christ's new creation within them, that is, by incorporating His operation of new creation within them. God works, Christ works, and the believers work, and in reality each action of good work by the believers is the incorporation of God in Christ Jesus in their work.

The apostle John also ties the believers' walk to the operation of Christ within them. A casual reading of 1 John 2:6 could easily suggest that John is recommending Christ's earthly life as a historical and external pattern for a believer's walk. But this is highly unlikely since John describes the believer as one who "abides in Him." (I do not think that John is suggesting any dissemblance here by speaking of one "who says he abides in Him." Rather, I believe that he is indicating that one's living should match one's reality.) Walking even as He walked refers not to a pattern to emulate but to a clear standard to validate one's abiding. Since the believers are abiding in Him, it is incumbent upon them, based on and because of their abiding in Him, to walk even as He walked, and to walk even as He walked is possible because now they abide in Him and draw from Him His virtue in His walk as their virtue in their walk. Because His believers have a special and mystical incorporation into Him, they are not limited to His example from history as a mere pattern for their living, as are all other human beings, who are unregenerated and not indwelt by Him. These latter may look to the historical Jesus for a high pattern of life, indeed the highest ever, but His believers, being organically incorporated into Him and abiding in Him, have the privilege of living Him out in their own living and should take His earthly living rather as a clear check on their so very mystical incorporation of Him. He walked in His ways in His days on earth, and today the believers walk in the same ways because they have been incorporated into Him to abide in Him and are able to incorporate Him with all His ways in their daily walk.

Hopefully from the portions above we can see that the believers' walk is something more than what we commonly understand when we hear phrases like *my walk with the Lord*, *a close walk with the Lord*, etc. Nowhere do the writers of the New Testament speak of walking with the Lord; rather, they speak of walking in the Lord or in or by the Spirit. And in so doing, they indicate that the believers' walk is not independent of the Lord Spirit, as though He were an external inspiration or pattern, but rather dependent on Him as the One who indwells them and operates within them as the source and element for their walk. Their walk, as the most general description of their living as believers, incorporates His operation within them.

Along the same lines as their general walk, the following portions speak of the believers' general living as an incorporation of the operation of Christ within them.

In this the love of God was manifested among us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him. (1 John 4:9)

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil. 1:21)

Yet with meekness and fear, having a good conscience, so that in the matter in which you are spoken against, those who revile your good manner of life in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:16)

And indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Tim. 3:12)

Previously we examined the love of God as incorporated in the believers' Christian and church life. Here we should further see that this love is eventually manifested in the believers' having life and living through the Son. God sent His only begotten Son into the world for this very purpose. As he commonly does when viewing other aspects of God's economy, here John views the whole work of the Son's coming into the world from an emphatically organic perspective. The life that the believers are to live as a result of the whole complex of God's sending action is "through Him," i.e., through the Son. John does not merely say that God sent the Son that the believers might have life and live but that this life and living is through the Son. More than mere redemption is contemplated; rather, John is referring to the experience of life that the believers gain at regeneration and enjoy continually through Christ, who is the eternal embodiment and expression of the Father's life, that is, the only begotten Son. That the only Begotten now provides the way for the believers to have life and live "was the proof, that such a Son of God was sent, that we might live" (Alford 4: 490). In His eternal existence He is the embodiment and expression of the life of the Father (as by definition a son is), and because His believers have life and live through Him as such, He makes manifest in them who the sending God really is. Because the believers incorporate the Son as their very life and living of this life, they manifest that He is indeed the Son, who has the life (John 1:4; 5:26; 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 1:2; 5:11-12), and they exhibit moment by moment the love of God who sent Him into the world, and because He is sent into this world in His eternal status as the Son of God, He manifests who the sending God is—the Father who is the source of life. By the believers' incorporation of the Son as their life in their living, who the Son is and more importantly who the Father is are profoundly exhibited and proved.

In Philippians 1:21 Paul declares, with almost startling utterance, that to him "to live is Christ." Commentators across the ages have struggled with Paul's words here, and many have tried in ingenious ways to get around the

apparent meaning. What does he mean by saying “to live,” and in what way is that Christ? The former question is probably easier to settle because of Paul’s clear contrast in the second part of the verse: “to die is gain.” Paul is contrasting two states of existence, one before death and one after death. “To live” sums up his whole existence in his physical body. It is akin to his longer expression in Galatians 2:20: “the life which I now live in the flesh I live.” But it is not merely the physical life that he is contemplating, as would be indicated by the Greek verb *bioō*. Rather, as John Chrysostom notices, here “to live” (Gk. *zēn*) refers not to Paul’s natural life but to his new and altered life as a Christian (*Hom. Phil.* III). This life which he lives in the flesh now is Christ Himself. “Life for *him* means Christ. He is one with his Lord” (Kennedy 428). For Paul to equate his living in his physical body as a believer with Christ is quite striking, and there are ways to reduce the full meaning of his words to something simply rhetorical. But given Paul’s propensity to speak of his participation in Christ throughout all his epistles, it is not likely that he means something less than his living out of the Christ who indwells him. To Paul living meant living Christ out and this to such an extent that the whole of his living could genuinely be called Christ. These four simple words—*to live is Christ*—sum up the whole notion of the believers’ incorporation of the operation of Christ within them for their Christian life.

In his first Epistle Peter also speaks of the general living of the believers as an incorporation of the operation of Christ within them, characterizing their good manner of life as being “in Christ” (3:16). As we have seen many times before for Paul, now for Peter we see that *in Christ* is not a religious formula but the expression of a realization that comes out of the genuine experience that the apostles had. Peter realized that all the believers have been put into Christ through God’s salvation and that this spiritual reality is their true situation even in the physical world that they live in. Because they are now in Christ, they have the genuine way to live by His operation within them and to live out His operation within them, and this becomes the element and content of their good manner of life in the world and particularly among those who revile them. Their good manner of life, being in Christ, is their incorporation of the continual operation of the Christ who indwells them.

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Paul says something similar to Timothy when he reminds him that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). He does not simply refer to living godly but to living godly in Christ Jesus, and the importance of this modifier cannot be stressed enough. What makes the believers’ living a godly living is not the conduct that they themselves produce but their incorporation of Christ Jesus, who lives within them. The believers should desire this kind of living, that is, a living that manifests the operation of Christ Jesus within them continually, and they should expect that this kind of living, which manifests the Christ who is within them, will stir up the hatred for Christ and persecution of Him that characterizes the world under the hand of the evil one. In this sense, persecution validates the godly living of the believers. Because the world hates the Lord (John 7:7), when His believers incorporate Him as the element and content of their godly living in the world, the world

hates them just as much (John 15:18; 17:14; 1 John 3:13). Though it may not realize this clearly, the world hates the believers’ incorporation of Christ in their daily living, and the world is quick to show this hatred through all kinds of persecution.

A final group of verses below refers to various other ways that Paul speaks of the believers’ general walk as an incorporation of the operations of the Triune God within them.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Gal. 5:18)

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom. 8:14)

For those who are according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but those who are according to the spirit, the things of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:5)

But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him. (Rom. 8:9)

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. (Rom. 13:14)

To be led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18; Rom. 8:14) is to follow the inward move and operation of the Spirit. Always

Paul's strong notion is that the Spirit is not external to the believers but rather dwells within them (v. 9). Therefore, the Spirit's leading is from within the believers, and their being led is their living out of His move and operation within them. For the believers to be led by the Spirit is for them to incorporate the Spirit's operation within them. To the Galatians Paul points out that their being led by the Spirit releases them from the demands of the law, for the Spirit is able to lead them from carrying out the works of the flesh, which he details in the verses following (5:19-21). Human beings, in their natural state, live out the flesh; sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3) is fully incorporated by them in their daily living. The law of God was given to expose this evil incorporation but has no power to curtail the flesh or to diminish its incorporation. But through God's salvation the Spirit is now within the believers, and when they actively incorporate the Spirit's move and operation within them in their living, that is, when they are led by the Spirit, the flesh with its passions and lusts is cut away (Gal. 5:24), and the need for and even the function of the law are annulled and set aside. Through their incorporation of the Spirit's move and operation within them, the believers completely bypass the law yet completely fulfill its demands. Indeed, their incorporation of the Spirit's operation within them, which we saw in detail at the beginning of this article as their general virtues, goes beyond law (vv. 22-23).

To the Romans Paul points out that their being led by the Spirit constitutes them sons of God (Rom. 8:14). Again, for the believers to be led by the Spirit is for them to incorporate in their living His move and operation within them. What is interesting here is that this incorporation constitutes them as sons and not, as we may expect, spiritual persons. The jump to sonship in this verse is somewhat jarring, and Paul uses the following verses to explain the relationship between the Spirit and the sonship of the believers. I have commented at length elsewhere that in these verses Paul shows that the Spirit incorporates the operation of Christ as the Son of God to make the believers likewise sons of God in a fully organic way and not as mere adopted ones ("Spirit's Incorporation of the Operations of Christ" 51-52). Of course, Christ is uniquely the only begotten Son of God, but through resurrection He is also the Firstborn among many sons, and it is the Spirit who applies Christ the Son to the believers and makes them sons of God with Him. Through His incorporation of Christ the Son, the Spirit is able to make the believers the many sons of God. But it is only when the believers incorporate the Spirit's operation (to incorporate the Son), that is, when they are actively led by the Spirit, that they are in reality the sons of God. By the life that they have through regeneration, they are children of God, and the Spirit Himself witnesses within the regenerated spirits of the believers to this fact (v. 16). But when the believers actively respond to the Spirit's move and

operation within them and live out His operation within them, they become more than children; they now function as sons, who bear the expression of that life with its responsibilities and rights, and they eventually mature to be heirs with Christ (v. 17).

Earlier in the same chapter Paul distinguishes between "those who are according to the flesh" and "those who are according to the spirit" and describes two manners of life, each incorporating its own essence as its source and for its expression—minding the things of the flesh and minding the things of the Spirit (v. 5). Being according to flesh is not quite the same as walking according to flesh, but "the latter is the *evidence* of the former, and a *consequence* of it" (Alford 2: 388); thus, it is right to examine this verse in relation to the believers' general walk. Those who are according to flesh are those "whose minds are set on, completely given to, the ways of the flesh"; in common terms, they "think flesh, eat flesh, sleep flesh" (Fee 541). They are according to flesh and, more importantly, they actively pursue a living that expresses flesh. In the truest sense of the term as we have been using it here, they incorporate flesh in all that they think and do. Contemplating them momentarily is worthwhile because they provide a vivid negative example of a living that is constituted with an essence within, that internally focuses on that essence, and that therefore expresses that essence openly and outwardly. All human beings have the flesh that Paul is speaking of, and we probably all know persons who exemplify the description here. The contrast that Paul makes depends on that knowledge, and his purpose is to unveil in counterpoint the living that the believers can and should have. Through regeneration they have a new essence within that constitutes them, that they should focus on internally, and that therefore they should express openly and outwardly. The contrast is between flesh and spirit, and as we have seen elsewhere, *spirit* here (with lowercase *s*) is a double reference to the human spirit of the believers and the Spirit of God who indwells it; it is the believers' regenerated human spirit mingled with the Spirit who now indwells them. Just as the problem with the flesh is the sin that indwells it (Rom. 7:17-18), so also the virtue of the spirit is the Spirit who indwells it. The believers can and should be those who are according to this *s*/Spirit, and they can and should be those who fully attend to the Spirit inwardly so that they live out the Spirit openly. This is their incorporation of the Spirit.

Some few verses later Paul refers again to the contrast between these two manners of life—"in the flesh" or "in the spirit" (v. 9). But here he explicitly indicates that the latter depends on the Spirit's indwelling. The believers can and should be "in the spirit" because the Spirit of God indwells them. To be "in the spirit," in the context of the preceding verses, should refer to the whole mode of

existence that we have been speaking of here, taking the Spirit as its essence, focusing on the Spirit inwardly, and therefore living out the Spirit outwardly. It is again an expression that refers to the believers' incorporation of the Spirit who dwells within them. Elsewhere I have commented on the Spirit's incorporation of Christ, which is here indicated by the title *the Spirit of Christ* ("Spirit's Incorporation of the Operations of Christ" 60-61). Here it may be sufficient to say that while Paul, up until this point in his exposition, has focused on the Spirit's indwelling as the essence for the believers' being "according to the spirit" and "in the spirit," at verse 9 he is about to introduce righteousness as the basis for the believers' having life in their spirit (v. 10), and righteousness is, as always in Paul's writings, Christ. Thus, the Spirit not only incorporates God as the source of life and is therefore called the Spirit of God; He also incorporates Christ as the righteousness within the believers that allows the believers to have life in their spirit and is therefore called the Spirit of Christ.

The last verse above is quite interesting in that it appears to offer a metaphor for the believers' incorporation of the operation of Christ within them for their general walk. Paul often speaks of the believers' putting on various things as though these were clothing—human virtues (Col. 3:12), divine attributes (Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 15:53-54; Eph. 6:11, 14; 1 Thes. 5:8), and the church as the new man (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). In these instances the clothing that is put on metaphorically by the believers is the outward and open expression of these virtues, attributes, and even church life in the believers' living. In all cases, the believers should incorporate these virtues, attributes, and church life in their living, and they can do so because inwardly they have the spiritual content to do so. In the last verse above Paul uses this metaphor for incorporation again and applies it to Christ: "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Akin to what he does with the other uses of the metaphor, Paul here is exhorting the believers to take Christ as their outward and open expression. This cannot be simple conformity to Christ as an external pattern. Rather, it must rely on the believers' having been put into Christ and therefore their being in Him, as he elsewhere indicates: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). In this sense, putting on Christ is the practical outworking of being in Christ. The divine and mystical fact is that the believers have been baptized into Christ and

are now continually in Him, as Paul is so fond of saying throughout his Epistles. But the divine and mystical fact needs a practical outworking, and for Paul this means that the believers should "wear" Christ openly, taking Him as their outward presentation to all. This they can do because He dwells within them. When they put on Christ as their outward expression, they incorporate Him in their daily living. It is probably the case, further, that in the second part of this verse ("make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts") Paul is offering a negative parallel. Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh means living out the lusts of the flesh, and this is the negative parallel to living out the Lord Jesus Christ as one's outward expression, i.e., putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Somewhat akin to what he says in Romans 8:5-14, here he indicates that there are two manners of life possible for the believers, one as the expression of Christ and one as the expression of the flesh. Both rely on the incorporation, in their general living, of what is within the believers—one, on the incorporation of Christ, and one, on the incorporation of the lusts of the flesh.

IT IS ONLY WHEN THE BELIEVERS
INCORPORATE THE SPIRIT'S OPERATION
(TO INCORPORATE THE SON), THAT IS,
WHEN THEY ARE ACTIVELY LED
BY THE SPIRIT, THAT THEY ARE
IN REALITY THE SONS OF GOD.

All the portions in this section on the believers' general walk make clear that in the teaching of the apostles the Christian life is not merely a life of mimicked behavior, even if the outward exemplar is Christ Himself. Rather,

the apostles understand and promote the fact that the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—lives in the believers and that the believers should walk according to Their operation within them. If the believers are able to imitate Christ at all, it is not simply because He stands apart from them as their pattern but rather because He dwells within them and operates within them as the source and element of their walk; they imitate organically. "Walk by the Spirit," "walk in Him," "live through Him," "to live is Christ," "a good manner of life in Christ," "to live godly in Christ Jesus," "led by the Spirit," "according to the spirit," "in the spirit," "put on the Lord Jesus Christ"—this is their idiom for the Christian life, and it reflects their understanding that even the general, common, and everyday living of the believers is the incorporation of the Triune God's operations within them. The normal Christian life, according to this teaching of the apostles, is altogether marvelous.

In Their Practical Service

Before concluding this article, I thought it would be good

to consider a small set of verses that show the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in the practical service of the believers in the early church. It is not unusual for us to read over these verses without much attention to them because they seem mundane and perhaps too personal to be of much spiritual help to us. But in all of these verses we find that Paul's fellow laborers carried out their practical and perhaps mundane service in the same way that Paul and his fellow apostles carried out their highest service in their ministry to the churches, that is, by incorporating the operations of the Triune God within them.

Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Greet Persis, the beloved sister, one who has labored much in the Lord. (Rom. 16:12)

But that you also may know the things concerning me, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you. (Eph. 6:21)

All the things concerning me, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow slave in the Lord, will make known to you. (Col. 4:7)

Furthermore we ask you, brothers, to acknowledge those who labor among you and take the lead among you in the Lord and admonish you. (1 Thes. 5:12)

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you much in the Lord, with the church, which is in their house. (1 Cor. 16:19)

I, Tertius, who write this epistle, greet you in the Lord. (Rom. 16:22)

I exhort Euodias, and I exhort Syntyche, to think the same thing in the Lord. (Phil. 4:2)

Yes, brother, may I have profit from you in the Lord; refresh my inward parts in Christ. (Philem. 20)

That you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been the patroness of many, of myself as well. (Rom. 16:2)

Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy, and hold such in honor. (Phil. 2:29)

Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Tychicus—these dear ones are privileged to have their names recorded for eternity in the Word of God not as mere acquaintances of Paul but as ones who labored “in the Lord.” The first three are sisters, as the grammatical gender of their

names indicates, and are mentioned only in this one place. The last is a brother who traveled with Paul (Acts 20:4; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12) and probably relayed some of Paul's Epistles to the recipient churches (cf. Eph. 6:21-22; Col. 4:7-8). Like Paul, these four dear ones carried out their service *en Kyriō* (“in the Lord”), and therefore he applies his signature expression to them. Their labor issued from their being incorporated into Christ and took Christ's operation within them as its element and motivating factor. Paul particularly commends Tychicus for his service in the Lord, describing him as a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow slave *en Kyriō*. Based on what we have seen concerning Paul's use of this phrase in its various forms, we should not diminish its full meaning here as mere religious jargon. Paul no doubt recognized in the service of his fellow laborers his own experience of incorporating the operations of Christ and in greatest honor to them noted it for all his readers to see. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 he similarly notes the incorporation of the Lord's operation by those who take the lead among the believers in the church.

Near the end of 1 Corinthians Paul passes on the greetings of his two co-workers Aquila and Prisca, noting here as well that their greeting is *en Kyriō*. It is probably not possible to determine if this modifier was added by Paul as his comment on their greeting or offered by Aquila and Prisca as their own testimony concerning their greeting. In either case, it echoes Paul's understanding that the ones who serve in the church must do so by incorporating the Lord's operation within them. At the end of his Epistle to Romans, Paul either allows or instructs Tertius to insert his own greeting to the saints, and remarkably it bears Paul's signature expression *en Kyriō*. In Greek the phrase can be understood to modify either *write this epistle* or *greet you*, and there is good reason to understand it either way. Most English translations opt for the latter, probably in view of 1 Corinthians 16:19, but either way, Tertius testifies to the incorporation of the Lord's operation within him. This is significant because in this one passing reference we see that Paul's deep realization concerning Christian service in the churches has become the way of service by one of his co-workers, even in this small matter.

In Philippians Paul exhorts two sisters in the church, Euodias and Syntyche, “to think the same thing in the Lord” (4:2), and the parallel structure and content of the exhortation hints at some dissension between these faithful serving sisters (Alford 3: 187). Apparently, the solution to the problem between them required of them something deeper than faithful service, and thus, Paul asks them to do something that does not come at all to individuals, that is, to think the same thing. This is only possible if their thinking is “in the Lord,” that is, if it is drawn from Him who dwells within them. It is probably not too much to say that most if not all problems in the church

derive from differences in thought that manifest themselves as different teachings and practices, which in turn divide the believers one from another, damage the testimony of oneness to the world, and ultimately destroy the church's impact at large. Paul's short exhortation, first to this one believer, then to this second believer, actually provides the full solution to this lingering problem at its very root, at the level of the most basic relationship in the church, between two believers. It is as if Paul were saying, "Think the same thing, not in yourselves, which is impossible by its very definition, but in the Lord, who is within you both as one Lord and from whom you can draw genuine oneness." Conceptually, this is akin to the Lord Jesus' own description of genuine oneness and practical one accord in Matthew 18:19-20: "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens. For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." "Two of you...in harmony" corresponds to thinking the same thing, and "gathered into My name" corresponds to "in the Lord." The effect (as opposed to the result) of this is that the Lord is mystically in the midst of these two or three. His presence is not token but effectual, working out from the Father who is in the heavens what is to be done for them. By being gathered into the Lord's name, the believers experience the virtue of being in the Lord, and by being in the Lord, they incorporate Him in their thinking and express Him with His desire as harmony in their service of prayer, which the heavenly Father is delighted to work out through Him.

In writing to Philemon, Paul calls upon the incorporation of the Lord's operation within Philemon and himself in verse 20. The purpose of Paul's lovely little letter to Philemon is to ask him to receive back his former escaped slave Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but above a slave, a beloved brother" (v. 16). Onesimus had been begotten in the faith through Paul while the two of them were in prison. Witness Lee, commenting on this verse, captures the full insight of this request:

This short Epistle serves the special purpose of showing us the equality, in God's eternal life and divine love, of all the members in the Body of Christ. In the semisavage age of Paul, the life of Christ had annulled, among the believers,

PHILEMON HAD TO EXPERIENCE
THE LORD INWARDLY TO ACCEPT
HIS FORMER SLAVE AS HIS BELOVED
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the strong institution of slavery. Since the sentiment of the love of the Christian fellowship was so powerful and prevailing that the evil social order among fallen mankind was spontaneously ignored, any need for institutional emancipation was obviated. Because of the divine birth and because they were living by the divine life, all the believers in Christ had equal status in the church, which was the new man in Christ and in which there was no discrimination between free and bond (Col. 3:10-11). (Recovery Version, note 1)

For Philemon to carry out so high a request required more than his natural constitution; thus, Paul expresses the wish that he might have such profit from him in the Lord. (Paul is probably playing on the Greek words here for *may I have profit* [Gk. *onaimēn*] and Onesimus [Gk. *Onēsimos*].) The profit that Paul wished for was Philemon's receiving of Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother with equal status in the new man, and this receiving could only be through Philemon's incorporation of the Lord's operation within him to receive his former slave in this new way. "En Kyriō,—not in worldly gain, but in the Lord—in thine increase and richness in the graces of His Spirit" (Alford 3: 434). Philemon had to experience the Lord inwardly to now accept his former

slave as his beloved brother, and by that experience of the Lord he incorporated the Lord's receiving as his own (cf. Rom. 15:7; 14:3). This for Paul was great profit in his ministry, which promoted the living of the one new man in all the churches. On his end Paul could be refreshed in his own inward parts "in Christ" by Philemon's incorporation of the Lord's operation within him. Knowing that Philemon will take the Lord as his inward grace to receive Onesimus as his brother, Paul is inwardly soothed and cheered, and in saying that his inward parts are refreshed "in Christ," he "refers to the real source from which the [refreshing] gets its strength" (Oesterley 216). For Paul to experience this refreshing is for him to experience the soothing and cheering Christ within him; thus, Paul incorporates Christ within him to experience the refreshing of his inward parts.

The final two verses above follow the same principle of Philemon's receiving of Onesimus, though to less pronounced a degree. Paul exhorts the churches to receive his co-workers Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30) "in the Lord." While the grace needed for

Philemon to accept a former slave as a beloved brother might have been greater than the grace needed for the churches to receive an apostle's co-worker, the same incorporation of the Lord's operation is at the core of both acts of receiving. No doubt, Philemon had to experience grace in order to incorporate the Lord's operation within to receive Onesimus with equal status in the new man, but very possibly the churches could have received Phoebe and Epaphroditus in a natural and merely human way out of their great respect for the apostle Paul. Yet even when it is easy to receive the Lord's co-workers (not to mention the believers in general), Paul exhorts the churches to do so *en Kyriō*, that is, by virtue of their incorporation of the operation of the Lord who dwells within them.

* * *

In what we have seen above, the believers are not left to their own devices when it comes to their walk, virtues, and practical service. The many portions from Acts through Jude make clear that in the mind of the apostles the Christian and church life should be one that incorporates the operations of the Triune God within the believers. Of course, there are many, many other portions in the New Testament that do not point to this incorporate living by the believers. But the apostles need not mention this everywhere to make the point. The abundance of references to the operations of the Triune God within the believers, even when they are mere passing references, indicate that the apostles understood that the Triune God's operations should motivate, enable, and pervade everything the believers do as genuine Christians and proper serving ones in the church. The Christian life, in their view, is not outward behavior; it is incorporation of the inner operations of God. As the apostles deal with the great number of issues in the New Testament and present explicitly the high truths of Christian faith, in their teaching they routinely specify by an inserted modifier here and another one there that believers should live, walk, and serve according to the gracious operations of the God who indwells them and not by their own natural virtue, way, and method. What they taught in this way matches what they were in their own character and service. The apostles themselves were patterns of incorporating the operations of the Triune God in their life and service, and thus, it comes as no surprise that they expected and taught the believers to be the same as they were. But even the apostles themselves had the Lord Jesus as their archetype of this incorporation, as is clear in the Gospel of John. As a man, He lived on the earth as the incorporation of the Triune God in His living and service, but, even more significantly, as the Son of God, He exists eternally as the incorporation of the Father by the Spirit. The intrinsic significance of the Lord Jesus, particularly as seen in the Gospel of John, is incorporation: in being God and in becoming man, He incorporates the operations of the

Triune God in all that He is and does. The intrinsic significance of the apostles is likewise incorporation: in carrying out God's move in His economy, they do not rely on their own virtue, gift, and action but rather live out the operations of the Triune God for their character and service. Thus, the intrinsic significance of the believers should be nothing less than that of Christ as their source and of the apostles as their guardians; it too is incorporation. What genuine virtues the believers have, what proper walk they follow, what practical service they give, all come forth from the Triune God, who indwells their regenerated human spirit and operates within them. **AFC**

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