

The Spirit's Incorporation of the Operations of Christ in Acts through Jude

by Kerry S. Robichaux

This article continues a study of the incorporate operations of the Triune God as presented in the New Testament books of Acts through Jude. My particular interest in this article will be the Spirit's incorporation of the operations of Christ and is meant to complement my previous article in this journal on the Spirit's incorporation of the operations of God the Father ("The Spirit's Incorporation"). The term *incorporation*, adopted from Witness Lee (*Issue* 21-22, 24-26, 40-42) and as applied in these articles, is used to describe any action by the Father, by the Son, or by the Spirit that manifests the operation of one or of both the other divine persons. Thus, a manifest action of the Spirit that clearly involves the operation of Christ, for example, is an instance of incorporation as I am using the term. The term *incorporation* also describes the similar action of the New Testament believers to manifest the operation of any or all of the persons of the Triune God, as we will see in later articles in this series.

Perhaps an examination of one verse will help to illustrate the principle of incorporation more concretely. In John 14:10 the Lord Jesus said, "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." Here two discrete aspects of the relationship between the Son and the Father are explicitly referred to, and one is implied. These three aspects more finely define what I wish to describe by the term *incorporation*. The implied aspect is one of mutual interdependence of existence, whereby the Son is the Son in the Godhead because there is a Father in the Godhead, and the Father is the Father in the Godhead because there is a Son in the Godhead. In terms of classical Latin theology this mutual interdependence of existence is called coinherence, or circuminsession. But also in this verse we explicitly see the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father: "I am in the

Father and the Father is in Me." This aspect of the relationship between the Son and the Father has more technically been called perichoresis (Greek for "mutual interpenetration") in Greek theology and circuminsession in Latin thought. Here the point is not a mutual interdependence of existence but a mutual interpenetration of hypostases and a dynamic fellowship in the divine life that exists among the persons of the Trinity. Also, John 14:10 explicitly refers to the hidden mutual operation of the Father in the manifest action of the Son on the earth. When the Son spoke openly on the earth, He did so by virtue of not only His own agency but also the operation of His heavenly Father, who abides in Him. The Son's action of speaking, and the effectual benefit of His speaking, occurred because the Father operated ("does His works"). The mutual operation of the three in every action of any one of the Divine Trinity is no doubt the most obvious aspect of incorporation to be found in the Gospel of John, because so much of the Gospel of John relates to the actions of the Son. But it should be noted that the mutual operation of the three in the Godhead manifests and depends on the other two aspects of incorporation—circuminsession (coinherence) and circuminsession (perichoresis).

John 14:10 speaks of Christ's incorporation of the operation of the Father, a theme which I explored in some depth in two articles on the Gospel of John in this journal in 2004 ("Johannine [1]"; "Johannine [2]"). The conclusion I came to in those articles, and hopefully affirmed persuasively, is that the more subtle message of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is not simply the incarnate Son of God who moved and acted for God's interests during His earthly sojourn but more intrinsically the incarnate Son of God who *incorporates the operations of the Father (and sometimes of the Spirit) in His every manifest action* during His earthly ministry. Hence, the Jesus of the Gospel of John is not the incarnation of

the Son of God separate from the Father and the Spirit, as many Christians today may casually understand, but the incarnation of the Son as the incorporation of the Triune God. Based on that study I became quite interested in seeing how this principle of incorporation is expressed in the subsequent books of the New Testament, and thus this current series of articles was engendered.

In turning to Acts and the Epistles, I hope to gather as many textual indications of the incorporation of the operations of the Divine Trinity in the manifest actions of the three of the Divine Trinity. I also hope to find similar indications in the actions of the New Testament believers, including specifically the apostles. Hence, I wish to consider discretely, from Acts and the Epistles, the actions of the Son, the actions of the Spirit, and the actions of the believers (including the apostles) insofar as they manifest the incorporated operations of the Divine Trinity. In the first article in this series (“The Operation of the Incorporate Triune God”), I attempted to demonstrate that in the life of the New Testament church, as depicted in Acts and the Epistles, often the actions of Christ Jesus the Lord manifest the incorporate operations of God generally and of the Father specifically. In the same article, I also tried to show that to a limited degree the activities of Christ, spoken of in Acts and the Epistles, incorporate the operations of the Spirit as well.

Typically, after the resurrection of Christ, we find that the Spirit manifests the operations of Christ (as we will see in this article), but in some few instances in Acts and the Epistles, we also find Christ spoken of as manifestly acting by the Spirit’s operation, and in the first article in this series I presented these instances. In the second article in this series (“The Spirit’s Incorporation”), I turned my attention to the activities of the Spirit that incorporate the operations of God generally and of the Father specifically. In this present and third article I wish to examine the Spirit’s incorporation of the operations of Christ in Acts through Jude. Then, in later articles, I intend to consider how the apostles incorporate the operations of the Divine Trinity in their work and ministry and how the New Testament believers incorporate the operations of the Divine Trinity in their living and service. In writing this series of articles, I hope to show from Acts and the Epistles the incorporate operation of the Divine Trinity in the life of the church as well as the church’s participation in, enjoyment of, and own activity by this divine incorporation.

After spending some months preparing for these articles, reading from Acts through the Epistle of Jude as carefully as I was able to, I am quite struck with how pervasive the incorporation of the Triune God is in the thought and writing of the New Testament authors. Certainly, this notion is rarely the explicit topic of what they write, but it is astounding how fully they interweave the operations of the Triune God into their descriptions of how Christ, the Spirit, the apostles, and the common believers function in the church as the Body of Christ. My deep impression after reading Acts and the Epistles is that, according to the New Testament, the operations of the Triune God are paramount to the identity of the church in life and service, an identity which is intrinsically interwoven with the incorporate operations of the Divine Trinity and which thereby manifests the Divine Trinity corporately and visibly. Like the common, natural, and false notions regarding the Trinity that many hold today, the concept of the Christian life that many hold today is somewhat shallow and commonplace, portraying the believer as someone who lives and acts in a purely ethical



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realm and who faintly represents God somehow. To many Christians this is the essence of the Christian life, and to suggest anything more than this is foreign and undesirable. But it seems that the writers of the New Testament speak of the believers in an altogether mystical way (to many even this suggestion repulses), describing them as the very extension of the incorporation that Christ was when He was on the earth visibly. It appears that in the view of the New Testament writers the believers are not independent ethical agents of God on earth, representing Him—usually poorly—to a world that is inferior to them in demeanor and behavior; rather, the believers are to live, act, and even exist as believers by the operations of the Divine Trinity within them. This is what I hope to establish in this series of articles.

A short word on Acts and the Epistles as the scope of this series of articles is probably in order. Some readers may take exception to such a massive clumping of text for my study, as I seem to be flying in the face of all accepted distinctions of genre and authorship. But I am

after a singular notion here, which I believe belongs to the common view of the New Testament writers and is not a distinctive notion of any one writer or a distinctive characteristic of any one genre of the New Testament. I do not deny that there are individual strands of thought among the various New Testament writers, and in my articles on the Gospel of John, in contradistinction to the Synoptic Gospels, I implicitly acknowledged such, in that I described a “Johannine Jesus.” But I feel that what I am touching on is not particularly Johannine, Pauline, Petrine, or other, but more generally, new-testamental and literally Christian. Thus, I wish to suggest that behind the differences in presentation that we find among the New Testament writers there is a core understanding and experience that these authors, almost casually, interweave into their writing. This core is, I submit, their understanding and experience of the one reality of the Triune God operating in their life and labor, and this transcends their human and textual differences. It is, as it were, their common background “culture” of God’s operation in their life and labor. This assumption underlies the whole of my presentation.

As I have done previously, in this article I will adopt a catalog-and-commentary format in which I present groups of verses arranged by similar theme and, following each group, some comments which I hope will bring out the qualities of the incorporation of the Divine Trinity, particularly in this article as it relates to the Spirit’s person and work as He manifests the operations of Christ. In each group I will arrange the verses thematically and not necessarily in the order in which they appear in Acts and the Epistles.

The Spirit’s Incorporation of Christ’s Operation

In His human living Christ lived and moved according to the operation of the Father and by the Spirit of God. This is, I believe, one of the major points in the Gospel of John, as I have tried to demonstrate in my two articles on John. Such a living resulted not simply from choice but from the reality of His being. As the Son of God, He exists inseparably from the Father and the Spirit, and likewise He acts inseparably from the Father and the Spirit. In the Gospel of John we repeatedly read His testimony that in His open and visible actions the Father is within Him working. In His human living Christ incorporated the operations of the Father and the Spirit according to the quality of His existence in the Godhead. The New Testament also testifies that in undergoing death and resurrection, the Son incorporated the operations of the Father and the Spirit (see my article “The Operation...”), again according to the quality of His existence in the Godhead. After His resurrection, Christ still holds the first place in God’s economy (Col. 1:18) and still operates for its full accomplishment. But in Acts and

the Epistles we see that Christ’s operation, though very often referred to directly as His action, is also very often characterized as being realized through the Spirit’s action. In the sections below I wish to present a number of passages from Acts and the Epistles that show the Spirit’s incorporation of Christ’s operation in the church, in the work of the apostles, and in the living of the believers.

Incorporation in Christ’s Operation to Initiate the New Testament Church

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave to them to speak forth...Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He [i.e., Jesus—v. 32] has poured out this which you both see and hear. (Acts 2:4, 33)

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit moved among the apostles and gave them the extraordinary ability to speak forth the word of God in foreign tongues. In every way this was an activity of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced not only by Luke’s explicit statements above but also by the presence of the Spirit’s manifest symbols, wind and fire (vv. 2-3). Yet in Peter’s testimony to the congregation, he declared that what his hearers both saw and heard was what was being poured out by Jesus Christ in ascension, and what was being poured out was the Holy Spirit as promised by the Father (v. 17). Thus, the manifest activity of the Spirit incorporated the hidden operation of Jesus Christ in ascension, and Christ’s operation in turn incorporated the operation of God the Father. But even further, what the Holy Spirit did manifestly was something that the congregation could both see and hear because the Spirit’s activity was incorporated, in part, in the actions and speaking of the apostles before them. This exceptional first work by the apostles after the resurrection was thoroughly an instance of the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in their service, through which Christ initiated the New Testament church. While it was the apostles who were visible to the congregants, it was manifestly the work of the Holy Spirit that was witnessed in the exceptional speaking of the apostles. Yet it is quite significant that Peter, in his own explanation of what was happening, referred to the events of that day as something that the ascended Christ was doing. While the Spirit moved to fill the apostles and to enable them to speak forth the gospel message in an exceptional way, Christ was at the same time in operation pouring forth the enabling Spirit, and in Peter’s view what was happening was in reality something that Christ was doing, albeit through the incorporate activity of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s operation in ascension, incorporated in the Spirit’s activity among the apostles, was itself God’s operation to pour out His Spirit upon the children of Israel as prophesied in Joel

2:28-32, quoted by Peter here in Acts 2. Thus, the initiation of the New Testament church was an operation of the three persons of the Triune God incorporated in the service of the apostles.

Incorporation in Christ's Sonship

Christ's outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a very open and visible action that ushered in the New Testament church in a manifestly corporate way. As a result of that action, "there were added on that day about three thousand souls" to the Lord in His church (v. 41). But we understand that what happened that day was not simply a social movement among enthusiastic human beings, because something deeper than enthusiasm occurred. Those who believed that day repented inwardly, were baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ as a sign of the reality of their being terminated in the old creation and joined to the Christ and His Body in the new creation, and received the Holy Spirit as a gift inwardly (v. 38). The Holy Spirit within them now became their inward reality, making real to them what Christ is, as He Himself promised in John 16:13-15. This particular function of the Spirit in the believers is often referred to in the Epistles, especially those of Paul and John, and we should note carefully the incorporate operation that these writers sometimes allude to when they describe the Spirit's function to make Christ real in the believers.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father! (Gal. 4:6)

For you have not received a spirit of slavery bringing you into fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father! (Rom. 8:15)

In Galatians 4:6 Paul speaks of the Spirit's activity to make Christ the Son real to the believers experientially, and in so doing, the Spirit makes real to the believers that they are the sons of God. Of course, in the eternal Godhead Christ is uniquely the Son of God, but according to God's good pleasure those chosen by Him enjoy sonship through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). They become genuinely the sons of God not by virtue of what they are in themselves but by virtue of what Christ is in Himself within them. Paul gives us quite a detailed, though succinct, description of the divine operation to make the

divine sonship real to the believers: God the Father sends forth the Spirit into their hearts, and the Spirit incorporates Christ's operation to continually respond as the Son to the Father. What is interesting in Paul's description is that it is the Spirit who cries (according to the grammar of the passage) as a son and not directly the Son. Thus, the Spirit incorporates the operation of Christ in Christ's unique function as the Son of God. We should not say, as some would like to say, that the Spirit merely represents the Son in the believers. This tears the Trinity into separable persons and ignores the coinherence and mutual interoperation of the three. Rather, we should recognize that it is indeed the Son who cries out to the Father, as He first did in the flesh (Mark 14:36) and as is appropriate to His own unique identity, but that it is the Spirit who incorporates this operation of the Son within the believers, as is appropriate to His own unique identity as the Spirit of reality within them (John 14:17). The Spirit does not make the Son real to the believers by representing Him within them; rather, the Son comes in the Spirit and operates through the action of the Spirit within the



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believers, and thus, the Spirit makes the Son real through His incorporation of the Son within them. This understanding better respects the triadic being and operation of God than does the common (and non-mystical) notion of mere representation.

In Romans 8:15 Paul refers again to this incorporate action of the Spirit, but here he says clearly that it is the believers who cry, "Abba, Father!" and not the Spirit, as he says in Galatians 4:6. Who then actually cries out to the Father as a son? It is the Son as the Spirit in the believers who cries out, for He alone is the Son who can cry, "Abba, Father!" But His operation as the Son is incorporated in the Spirit's activity within the believers, and the believers genuinely experience the Son's operation within them through the Spirit, so that their cry is the Son's cry and so that the Son's cry makes them genuinely sons. They do not mimic the cry of the Son of God; rather, they manifest the cry of the Son of God through their own incorporation of the Spirit's activity to incorporate the Son. Thus, they are sons not by imitation (or

adoption!) but by incorporation of the Son in their own actions, words, and emotions.

Perhaps it is appropriate here to comment on the concept of sonship insofar as it relates to the notion of incorporation. The Bible version used in this article (Recovery Version) renders the Greek word *huiiothesia* as “sonship” (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph 1:5), in distinction to most other English versions, which render the word as “adoption” or some variant thereof. The majority rendering is natural enough, in that conceptually it is not easy to understand how God can make human beings His sons except through some declaratory or legal way. Further, Paul uses the term in a few places with reference to one of the legal benefits of being sons (Rom. 8:23; 9:4), that is, inheritance. But the question is: Is the legal concept of adoption in full accord with what the New Testament teaches about the way God makes human beings His sons? It does not seem to be, for there are at least two particular New Testament truths related to the believers as the sons of God which are not adequately conveyed by the concept of adoption: the divine birth of the believers and the incorporation of the Son in the believers. While a full examination of the truth related to the divine birth is beyond the theme of this article, it is perhaps sufficient to note here that the New Testament clearly teaches that human beings become the children of God through an organic process, not a legal one. They are said to be born anew, born of the Spirit, begotten of God, regenerated, and that of incorruptible seed (John 1:13; 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; James 1:18, 21; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). Thus, there is an organic reality which underlies the believers’ identity as children and sons of God, a reality based in the divine life of God and actualized through the divine birth that the believers experience at regeneration. Unlike an adoption in any usual sense of the term, the believers’ becoming the children of God is through birth and by life, the divine life of God the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Further, what God the Father does in begetting human beings as His sons testifies to His generative function as Father, not to an inability to have children, as adoption in any usual sense of the term does. Personally, the concept that God can only legally adopt children is a bit at odds with the reality of His eternal paternity. God is eternally the Father and eternally able to give life as a Father; thus, to say that His believers are His adopted sons is awkward and not in line with His fatherhood. Of course, the notion of adoption fits the natural concept of many because in point of fact the human beings who become sons of God are already in existence when they are made His sons and do not come into existence as created beings through the act of being made His sons. Adoption is the act of making someone (who obviously has already been born of someone else) a legal heir of the adoptive parents, and what the adoptee is naturally and organically is not affected by

the legal action. But here again the notion of adoption is at odds with the truth of the New Testament because through God’s salvation every believer becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and enjoys the new life of God. While each believer has come into physical existence through his or her natural birth by earthly parents, what each believer is in Christ is in reality something newly created according to the divine life of God and thus indeed a genuine birth. Thus, in God’s salvation every believer is affected both naturally and organically; a new life—the divine life of God—and a new nature are imparted, and every believer is a new creation. Unfortunately, those who insist on an adoptive relationship with God must either deny or ignore the divine and mystical reality of the believers’ being born of God by His divine life and becoming a new creation in Christ. But let us be clear that according to the teaching of the New Testament God does not adopt human beings of the old creation to be His sons but rather regenerates them with His divine life to make them each a new creation in His Son Christ and genuinely—that is, according to His life and nature—His children and sons.

In addition to the divine life with its nature, which makes the believers genuine sons of God, there is also the Spirit as the reality of the Son within the believers who constantly witnesses and attests to their genuine sonship in Christ. Human adoptees, if they know that they are adopted, live with the constant sense that they are not natural children of their adoptive parents. This may not matter practically, as adoptive parents generally love their adopted children as much as they would natural ones. But the natural and organic identity cannot be loved into existence and may from time to time betray the actual relationship, even in adopted children who do not know that they are adopted. Unlike adopted children, the believers have a constant inner witness, from God the Spirit Himself, that they are sons of God. And this witness is not simply testimonial or representational; it is, as we have seen, an incorporation of the Spirit as the reality of the Son of God in the believers. On the one hand, the Spirit is within them crying, “Abba, Father!” as the reality of the Son (Gal. 4:6), but on the other hand, they incorporate the Spirit as the reality of the Son within them, and they themselves cry, “Abba, Father!” as sons of God in reality (Rom. 8:15). They are sons of God by incorporation into the unique Son of God. Thus, the believers are genuinely sons of God, not adopted at all, because they have been born of God, possess His divine life and nature, are new creations in Christ, incorporate the unique Son of God inwardly, and bear the Spirit’s operation to testify inwardly to their sonship. When they cry, “Abba, Father!” they cry as genuine sons of God and not adopted ones. There is no adoption in God’s economy, and neither should we understand Paul’s use of the Greek word *huiiothesia* as pointing to adoption.

Incorporation in the Testimony of Christ

One of the Spirit's main activities is to make Christ real to the believers. The apostle John speaks particularly of this in his first Epistle:

This is He who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood; and the Spirit is He who testifies, because the Spirit is the reality. For there are three who testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are unto the one thing. (1 John 5:6-8)

The water and the blood spoken of here refer to aspects of the Lord Jesus' physical tenure on the earth and point to two great events in His earthly ministry, His baptism in the water of the Jordan and the shedding of His blood on the cross. At both these events, ample testimony that He is the Son of God was given (Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:31, 34; 19:31-35; Matt. 27:50-54). But here John goes on to say that it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the reality. By this we

understand that in the two events which the water and the blood refer to, the Spirit was there as the reality of the testimony being given, even as He was there as the reality of the testimony expressed in the entirety of Jesus' earthly ministry (John 3:34). The New Testament record indicates that the Spirit was in operation in each of the two events (Matt. 3:16; Heb.

9:14), and here John characterizes the Spirit's operation as also providing the reality to the testimony given. While these verses do not explicitly speak of the Spirit's incorporation of Christ's operation, they probably allude to it. While the water and the blood provide physical testimony to what Jesus was doing in His ministry (i.e., initiating His earthly ministry through His baptism and redeeming humankind through His death), the Spirit provides the reality to the testimony of who He is because the Spirit is the reality of who He is, and the Spirit is the reality of who Christ is because Christ's operation is incorporated in the Spirit's work. While John refers to the historical events of Christ's earthly ministry, his appeal to the Spirit's activity as the testimony to Christ's divine operations has general, universal, and timeless validity, and it is this general validity that benefits the believers he addresses. "The Spirit is He who testifies" not just at the moments of Christ's baptism and crucifixion but more importantly at the present moment in the lives of the believers, and this, I believe, is John's whole point. The Spirit is still functioning to make Christ's divine operations real to the believers.

Incorporation in Christ's Abiding Presence

While in a general way the Spirit provides testimony and revelation to the divine reality of Christ, more particularly the Spirit makes Christ real to the believers by manifesting Christ's numerous operations within them. The most basic of these operations is Christ's abiding presence, which the Spirit maintains within the believers.

And he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And in this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He gave to us. (1 John 3:24)

A common notion among many believers is that in a resurrection Christ abides in heaven and the Spirit abides in the believers as Christ's representative. However, John's word here makes it clear that Christ abides quite definitely in the believers and that it is by the Spirit that the believers know that Christ abides in them. While Christ's operations within the believers



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are mysterious and invisible, the Spirit gives the believers a way to perceive them and to know thereby that indeed Christ is abiding in them. If Christ is abiding in the believers and the Spirit in the believers is making Christ's abiding presence known to them, we need not press hard to understand that the Spirit makes Christ's abiding presence real by incorporating Christ's operations within the believers. Christ abides in the believers in and as the Spirit within them, and the Spirit within them manifests not a separate identity and action but the incorporate presence of Christ in His identity and operation, as is His main function as the Spirit of reality.

In his statement John implies that Christ in His post-resurrectional state can escape the notice of the believers, even though He is in reality abiding within them. But through the Spirit's action the abiding Christ is made known to the believers, and this is no doubt due to the nexus of state that exists between God the Spirit and the human being as a spiritual being. While we do not typically

consider the human being as a spiritual being, the spirituality of human existence is key to the thought of the New Testament writers regarding our relationship with God. For example, in his Gospel John recalls the Lord's word that "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (3:6), indicating that the Spirit's operation to regenerate human beings obtains because of a spiritual dimension that they possess. Paul similarly declares that "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. 6:17), appealing to the spiritual dimension of human existence as the basis for union with Christ. In Hebrews we read that as the Father of the believers, God is the "Father of spirits," in contrast to our earthly fathers, who are "the fathers of our flesh" (12:9), showing that in our relationship in life with God, we are in one sense intrinsically spiritual. According to the New Testament writers the locus of this human spiritual dimension is the human spirit, which is frequently referred to in their writings (e.g., John 4:24; Rom. 8:16; 1:9; 1 Cor. 14:14-16; 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25; Heb. 4:12; James 2:26; 1 Pet. 3:4; Rev. 22:6). No doubt, in creating us, God gave us a spiritual dimension, a spirit (Gen. 2:7; Job. 32:8; Zech. 12:1), to correspond to what He is as Spirit (John 4:24) and to ultimately provide Him the way to communicate His reality to us on the basis of what He is by nature and what we are by His creation. It appears that John assumes this realization here. God the Son in His mystical existence in resurrection abides in the believers, but it is God the Spirit who makes the Son's abiding real within them because as Spirit He has the way to communicate this reality to them through their spirits (see also 1 Cor. 2:11-12).

Incorporation of Christ's Mind and Intercession

One of the blessings of the believers' life in Christ is access to His mind, which gives to them His discernment of things around them according to the divine perspective. Paul indicates that the mind of Christ is made clear to the believers through the activity of the Spirit.

But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:15-16)

Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. But He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to God....Who is he who condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died and, rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Rom. 8:26-27, 34)

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul stresses that there are fundamentally two kinds of people, and each kind is characterized by the part of their being which dominates and most controls their understanding and bearing. The "soulish man" is the human being who lives wholly by the inclinations and motivations of his or her human soul, while the "spiritual man" lives according to his or her human spirit, which here is understood by Paul to be indwelt by the Spirit of God (2:11-12). Again, we see the nexus of God the Spirit and the human spirit as the basis for God to communicate His reality to human beings. But Paul goes on to say that the spiritual person—that is, the person who lives by his or her spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God—has the mind of Christ, which gives to him or her the ability to discern all things. Thus, the mind of Christ is made available to the believers through the action of the Spirit who indwells them. There is nothing here in Paul's words to suggest that the Spirit merely represents Christ's mind to the believers. On the contrary, his almost casual equivalence of the Spirit's action in the believers with the manifestation of the mind of Christ within them suggests that in his view the Spirit acts to manifest the mind of Christ within the believers, that the Spirit incorporates the mind of Christ within them.

Writing to the Romans, Paul again points to the Spirit's action to incorporate Christ's mind in the believers, but this time as it relates to the believers' exercise of prayer. In Romans 8:26 he tells us that in deepest prayer we may not know what is fitting to pray, but he assures us that in our deepest prayer the Spirit groans in intercession according to what is fitting to God. This is, in itself, an act of incorporation, by which we the believers incorporate the Spirit's intercession in our own prayer and thereby give our prayer divine effect. But Paul goes on to indicate that the intercession that he is talking about includes the intercession of Christ at the right hand of God (v. 34). These are not two separate intercessions, one by the Spirit in the believers and one by Christ at the right hand of God; rather, this is one great incorporate intercessory action, in which the believers incorporate the Spirit's groanings according to God and in which the Spirit incorporates the intercession of Christ, who is at the right hand of God. It is uniquely Christ's function as High Priest to make perpetual intercession for the believers to God (Heb. 7:25), and the Spirit incorporates Christ's intercessory exercise within the believers to help them pray in a way that befits God's intention for them, that is, according to His economy of salvation (Rom. 8:28-33). If we are able to momentarily relax our notions of time and space in the physical universe and allow ourselves to peek slightly into the divine and mystical realm of the Trinity's operation, we may be able to perceive that when Christ is at the right hand of God interceding for us, He is at the

same moment operating in the Spirit's actions within the believers on earth so that they may pray for what befits their complete salvation. The Spirit who intercedes within the prayer of the believers incorporates the operation of Christ to intercede for them according to God, and in this way the Spirit makes known the mind of Christ to them for their prayer. Paul's understanding of what happens in the divine and mystical realm when the believers pray properly is certainly deep and far more significant than many popular notions about what prayer is. As seen in Romans 8, proper prayer is thoroughly an exercise by the believers that incorporates the Spirit's activity in their human spirit to incorporate in turn Christ's priestly function at the right of God to intercede for them according to the full realization of God's economy.

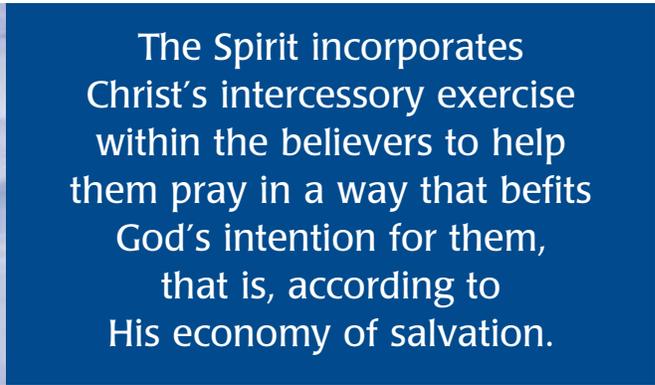
Incorporation in the Revelation of Christ

A deeper function of the Spirit is His action to reveal Christ in the believers. Paul both experienced this matter (Gal. 1:16) and prayed solemnly that the believers would experience it.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. (Eph. 1:17)

Almost all English versions of the Bible render the word *spirit* in lowercase and provide an indefinite article before it, steering the reader away from a direct reference to the Spirit of God and suggesting either some quality of the human spirit or a nebulous reference to some human attitude. Fee has argued forcefully for a rendering that directly refers to "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," and his linguistic reasons cannot be overlooked easily (674-676). On the other hand, the understanding of the majority of English translators and a great number of commentators also cannot be easily dismissed. It is more likely the case that neither position is entirely right...or wrong...and that what Paul is referring to is both the human spirit of the believers and the Holy Spirit of God as one entity in union through the believers' regeneration. In this case, here the Spirit can be seen as operating within the believers to give them divine wisdom and divine revelation, and the regenerated spirits of the believers can be understood as the receiving organ within them for receiving the divine wisdom and divine revelation. Again, we see the nexus of God as Spirit and the believers as human beings of spirit.

The wisdom and revelation that the Spirit gives to the believers in their spirit is "in the full knowledge of Him." The pronoun *Him* here could refer either to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" or to "our Lord Jesus Christ," but in either case Christ should be understood to be the actual content of the full knowledge. This is clear if we understand the antecedent to be "our Lord Jesus Christ." But if we understand the antecedent to be "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ," we must remember that full knowledge of God the Father comes only through Christ (cf. John 14:9; Col. 2:2; 3:10; Heb. 1:3), and hence, what the Spirit bears to the believers as full knowledge of God the Father comes through Christ's operating to manifest who the Father fully is. I hope that in previous articles in this series I have adequately shown that Christ manifests the Father by way of incorporating the Father's operations in His own actions as the Son and that this is a unique function of Christ the Son. Here I wish to submit that in turn the Spirit reveals this incorporating and manifesting Christ within the believers by incorporating Him in His own actions as the Spirit and that this is His unique



The Spirit incorporates Christ's intercessory exercise within the believers to help them pray in a way that befits God's intention for them, that is, according to His economy of salvation.

function as the Spirit of reality. Thus, what the Spirit does in the believers is reveal Christ as the full knowledge of God, the Father of glory, within them. Christ is the full knowledge of God by way of incorporation, and the Spirit reveals Christ within the believers by way of incorporation. Again, the Spirit is not to be understood as representing Christ in the believers separate from Christ and the Father but as unfolding the reality of Christ the Son as the full knowledge of God the Father within them. This is the divine wisdom and revelation that Paul prays for.

Later in his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul makes a similar statement about the Spirit's activity to reveal Christ, but this time it is relative to the New Testament apostles and prophets.

By which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit. (Eph. 3:4-5)

Here the Spirit's operation is again indicated by a reference to the apostles' and prophets' spirit, which is indwelt by the Spirit, is one with the Spirit, and serves as the practical basis in their being for the Spirit's operation within them for their ministry. Paul particularly characterizes the ministry of the apostles and prophets as uniquely grounded in the revelation of the mystery of Christ, and again he assigns this revelatory action to the work of the Spirit in the spirit of God's New Testament people, here the apostles and prophets. What the apostles and prophets know of the mystery of Christ comes to them through the activity of the Holy Spirit within them, who intimates the reality of Christ to them by way of incorporating Christ in His (the Spirit's) own actions within the apostles and prophets.

The phrase *the mystery of Christ* here is something more than a reference to Christ individually, though it certainly refers to Christ in a genuine way. Like all the New Testament mysteries (Matt. 13:11; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:3; Col. 1:26; Rev. 10:7), the mystery of Christ is something that is not open to the general non-Christian public and was not known even to the Old Testament saints. As we have seen, it comes by revelation through the activity of the Spirit in the spirit of the New Testament believers. Thus, the mystery of Christ is a view of Christ that is not obvious by natural apprehension, and in the context of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians it relates to Christ in His expression through the church as His Body—"that in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel" (3:6). We will explore this matter in more depth in a later article, but here we should see that the mystery of Christ is not simply the joint participation of the Gentiles with the Jews in God's new covenant and economy, but more importantly it is the incorporation of Christ in His one mystical Body, which includes the redeemed and regenerated Jews and Gentiles. "In Christ Jesus" the Gentiles enter into joint participation with the Jews, and the joint participation includes the fellow membership "of the Body." The phrases *in Christ Jesus* and *of the Body* point to Christ's incorporation in His Body. Hence, the revelation of the mystery of Christ is the revelation—previously hidden from all but now made manifest through the Spirit's activity in the holy apostles and prophets—that Christ is now incorporated in His church, which is His Body and indeed His fullness today (Eph. 1:22-23).

Along this same line, we find in John's first Epistle an intimation of the Spirit's incorporation of Christ's operation as it relates to the believers' ability to know the truth.

And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know. (1 John 2:20)

The anointing that John mentions here is a reference to the function and action of the Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38), but John goes on to qualify the reference by saying that this anointing is "from the Holy One." According to the definition of the Greek word here (*chrisma*), an anointing is that which is rubbed on a recipient for inaugural purposes (or possibly medicinal purposes), and thus, an action is implied in the word as well as an agent of the action. In Greek the phrase *from the Holy One*, referring to Him as the source of the anointing, can also very possibly be taken to refer to Him as the agent of the anointing action ("by the Holy One" as in RSV, NRSV, and NJB). It may very well be that both meanings are at play here in John's thought. But whether the meaning is simple source or simple agent or both, the operation of the Holy One is definitely implied in the anointing action, and we can see that the Spirit, as that which is applied through the anointing action, incorporates the anointing action from and by the Holy One. The question, then, is, who does the phrase *the Holy One* refer to? There is good reason to refer the title either to God generally (1 Pet. 1:15; Rev. 16:5) or to Christ specifically (Mark 1:24; John 6:69; Acts 2:27; 3:14; Rev. 3:7), but it may be in keeping with the general New Testament revelation of Christ as the Holy One of God to understand the phrase here to refer to Christ (though by incorporation God the Father is also included in Christ as the Holy One). If that is the case, then the anointing that John speaks of here is an indirect reference to Christ's operation in and by the Spirit to anoint the believers so that they may inwardly know what is truth.

Incorporation in Christ's Operation within the Apostles

We saw above that the Spirit functions in the apostles and prophets to reveal the mystery of Christ within them for their ministry among the churches. We should now look at a few passages that show some aspects of the Spirit's incorporating the operations of Christ in the work of the apostles. In a later article I will attempt to show more fully that the work and ministry of the apostles are fully an enterprise that incorporates the operations of the Triune God, but here I wish to preempt that larger examination with a small subset of passages that is in line with the theme of this article, that is, the Spirit's incorporation of Christ's operations. These few passages show Christ specifically operating in the Spirit and the Spirit thereby operating in the apostles as they move and work in their ministry.

And when they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, yet the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. (Acts 16:7)

As Paul and his co-workers traveled on their ministry

journeys, the Lord sometimes intervened in visions to direct their movements (vv. 9-10; 18:9; 23:11; 27:23-24). In Acts 16:7, however, particular mention is made of the Spirit functioning to direct their movement, and in this case the Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus. The title, quite striking and unique in all the New Testament, indicates that essentially it was Jesus who was directing their movements in their ministry journey. But Luke's utterance here tells us something about his understanding of Jesus' operation in the apostles' movement and ministry. First, Jesus operates in the Spirit, and this is no doubt the significance of the phrase *the Spirit of Jesus*. In the previous verse Luke says that "they passed through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (v. 6); here in verse 7 the Spirit is more narrowly described as the Spirit of Jesus. Luke does not have two Spirits in mind here but apparently wishes to show that the Holy Spirit was in reality the Spirit of Jesus insofar as the Spirit functioned to direct the movements of the apostles. While it was the Holy Spirit that the apostles experienced directly, it was Jesus whom the Holy Spirit incorporated and manifested to them in their experience. First forbidding them to turn south (into Asia) and then later not allowing them to turn north (into Bithynia), the Spirit incorporated Jesus' directives to the apostles so that the gospel could be brought into Europe for the first time (vv. 8-10). Second, the Lord is referred to here by His simple name, Jesus, which is quite significant in the context. Normally, when the simple name Jesus, without further appellations (e.g., Christ, Lord), is used outside the Gospels, Christ's humanity is being stressed, either with reference to the testimony of the incarnation or to His sufferings as a human being. For this reason, the phrase *the Spirit of Jesus* evokes the very human quality that the Spirit takes on by virtue of incorporating the operations of Jesus within the apostles. Witness Lee's note on the phrase is helpful:

The Spirit of Jesus and *the Holy Spirit* in the preceding verse are used interchangeably, revealing that the Spirit of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. *The Holy Spirit* is a general title of the Spirit of God in the New Testament; *the Spirit of Jesus* is a particular expression concerning the Spirit of God and refers to the Spirit of the incarnated Savior who, as Jesus in His humanity, passed through human living and death on the cross. This indicates that in the Spirit of Jesus there is not only the divine element of God but also the human element of Jesus and the elements of His

human living and His suffering of death as well. Such an all-inclusive Spirit was needed for the apostle's preaching ministry, a ministry of suffering carried out among human beings and for human beings in the human life. (Holy Bible Recovery Version, ad loc.)

This emphasis on the humanity of Jesus as incorporated in the Spirit's activity among the apostles is reinforced by the vision that Paul received at this time. In the vision a man appears, a Macedonian, entreating Paul to come over and help them, and afterward Paul and his company conclude that God was calling them into Macedonia (vv. 9-10). It was through a very human cry for help that God called the apostles into this new domain for the gospel, and the very human Jesus, incorporated in the Spirit who moved within them, had been actively directing them to Troas, where they could best set off for Macedonia. While Luke does not clearly state why the emphasis in this portion of Paul's ministry journey is so strongly human, one cannot help but speculate that Luke was moved by the very human need that



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the apostles' gospel and ministry was about to meet. Indeed, this "jump" from Asia Minor into Europe, marked as it was by the unique designation of the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus and by the unique vision, from God, of a Macedonian man calling for help, began the eventual evangelization of the entire globe, which only concluded some 1800 years later. In a very real sense, the vision was symbolic of the cry of the entire human race across all future generations, and the very human Jesus was operating in the Spirit within the apostles to meet this great need. Jesus the man, now glorified but still human, and incorporated in the Holy Spirit, operated within the apostles to meet the need of sinners everywhere and enlarge the kingdom of God on the earth.

Paul speaks directly about the Spirit's incorporation of Christ's operation within him when he comments in a general way about his ministry among the Gentiles.

For I will not dare to speak anything of the things which Christ has not accomplished through me for the obedience

of the Gentiles, by word and by work, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 15:18-19)

Here Paul characterizes the various activities of his gospel preaching as the things that Christ accomplished through him in the power of the Spirit of God. Manifestly, the words and the works and the signs and wonders were the visible actions of Paul, but Paul makes it clear that his actions were done in the power of the Spirit of God. Thus, what gave his ministry its great effect was not simply his great activity but more importantly his incorporation of the Spirit's operation in his activity. Indeed, we should expect that Paul would confess that his activity was possible only through the Spirit's operation within him and not through some virtue of his own. But in addition, Paul clearly indicates that what he did through the Spirit's operation within him was, in fact, the accomplishments of Christ Himself. We could diminish the significance of Paul's utterance here and understand him to be saying that his actions simply represented Christ's actions or that he was simply Christ's deputy on earth, and hence, his actions could therefore be rhetorically ascribed to Christ. But if Paul would not dare to speak of things that he himself did not do, why should we think that Christ would take credit for things that His servants did apart from Him even if they represented Him? It seems that the whole thrust of Paul's point here is not that he himself accomplished something and therefore he had the right to speak of it, but that in reality Christ operated to accomplish something through him, and for this reason he could speak of it. In the previous verse he declares that he has his boasting "in Christ Jesus in the things pertaining to God," drawing on the unique mystical phrase by which he often identifies his actions as incorporated by Christ. We do not do justice to Paul's words here if we take them as mere rhetorical embellishment and deprive them of their full significance. Paul was speaking of a reality in his ministry, just as the power of the Spirit of God was a reality in his ministry and not a trope. Christ in reality operated in Paul's ministry activities so that He was able to accomplish the obedience of the Gentiles through Paul. Practically speaking, Christ's operation through Paul occurred by the Spirit's operation in power through him, and hence we see the Spirit's incorporation of Christ's operation once more. As Paul traveled from Jerusalem, around the northern arc of ancient Asia, and unto the limits of Macedonia and Illyricum, preaching the gospel and teaching the truth, the Spirit operated in power within him to give his actions their great effect among the people, but Paul realized that the Spirit's operation in reality incorporated Christ's operation in His heavenly ministry and that through the Spirit's operation Christ in reality worked out (as the Greek word *katergazomai* in verse 18 indicates) the

accomplishments of His heavenly ministry among the Gentiles through him. Paul's boldness to speak of his ministry was not a boldness regarding the activity and sphere of his own work; rather, it was a boldness to speak regarding what Christ had done in the Spirit's operation within him, a boldness to speak of his incorporation of the Spirit's incorporation of the operation of the ascended Christ.

Turning more to the inward effect of the apostles' ministry, we find a passage in Paul's Epistles where he speaks of the Spirit's work in his ministry as an incorporation of Christ's operation within the believers.

Since you are being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone but in tablets of hearts of flesh. (2 Cor. 3:3)

The metaphor here is very detailed, and there is quite a bit of controversy in its interpretation, as indicated in the commentaries. But without straying too deeply into the issues, we should be safe in saying that what the apostles ministered to the believers was something that was imbued with the Spirit of the living God, and thus, their activity incorporated the operation of the Spirit. We will look more carefully at the incorporation of the Spirit's operation in the activities of the apostles in the next article in this series, but here we should note that what the apostles ministered to the believers through their incorporation of the Spirit's operation was also something "of Christ." In the previous verse Paul declares that the Corinthians themselves were the apostles' letter, which commended the apostles and their work to all (v. 2). In this verse he goes on to give the reason why the Corinthians can be their commendation: "since you are being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God." What commended the apostles and their ministry was God's inscribing operation, with the Spirit of the living God as the "ink" of that writing, to make the Corinthian believers a letter of Christ. As we saw above, Paul did not base the validity of his ministry on his activities alone but more importantly on the fact that in his actions Christ operated, and this operation was through the Spirit's action. What commended Paul and his co-workers was not simply that they had worked among the Corinthians, as though they were his "territory" of sorts, but that Christ had so operated in the Corinthians through their ministry that the Corinthians themselves could be called a letter of Christ that manifested the result of His operation to all. Christ's operation was genuinely effective within the Corinthians because the Spirit of the living God was there as the reality and essence of Christ within them. It was the Spirit of the living God that was inscribed with-

in the hearts of the Corinthian believers, but this did not make them a letter of the Spirit, nor simply a letter of the living God; rather, the Spirit was within them as a reality that made them a letter of Christ, and this indicates that the Spirit functioned within them to make them the testimony of Christ. As we see again and again in his Epistles, Paul here equates the reality of what Christ is and does with the activity of the Spirit within the believers. The Spirit was the genuine and present reality within the Corinthians believers, but that reality served to make them something of Christ. This hardly suggests that the Spirit was within them as the separate representative of an absent Christ, as many may hold; instead, holding to the inseparability of the divine persons, we should understand that the Spirit incorporated Christ, in presence and operation, within the Corinthians and made Christ real within them, so that they were in reality a letter of Christ. This reality occurred because of the apostles' ministry, and the reality of the Corinthians as a letter of Christ, through the Spirit within them, commended the apostles and their ministry to all. If I may be allowed to boil the matter down so simply, what commended the apostles and their ministry was that the Corinthian church incorporated the result of the apostles' ministry, which in turn incorporated the Spirit's operation to make Christ real within the believers. The real import of what the apostles do and what the church with its believers is, is that Christ is incorporated through the Spirit's function among them.

Incorporation in Christ's Operation within the Believers

In my search for indications of the incorporate operations of the Triune God in Acts and the Epistles, about half of the instances I found (254 of 513) involve the life, living, and work of the believers. My intention is to fully cover all these instances in the last few articles in this series, and my hope in doing so is to show that the Christian life and the Christian church life are fully a matter of incorporation, whereby the believers live not according to their own concept and opinion concerning the Christian life nor even merely according to the highest standards of Christian ethics and morality but fully according to the actual operation of the Triune God within them. In their life, living, and work, the believers incorporate the operations of the Triune God so fully that their actions can be said to be at the same time the operations of God, and through their actions God in Christ as the Spirit is manifested (not

represented!) openly. In those many instances of the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God, we generally see the believers incorporating the Father in one instance, the Son in another, and the Spirit in yet another, and often we see the believers incorporating the Son's incorporation of the Father. We will examine all these instances in the last few articles in this series, but in this article I wish to pull aside a few passages that show the Spirit incorporating Christ's operation within the believers, as I did with the apostles in the preceding section.

The first of these passages are found in Romans 8, where Paul intertwines references to the Spirit and to Christ with apparently no regard for the Trinitarian anxieties that we modern readers sometimes bring to the text.

For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death. (Rom. 8:2)

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



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the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness. (Rom. 8:9-10)

Paul offers the law of the Spirit of life in Romans 8:2 as the solution to the woes that accompany the body of death with its law of sin in Romans 7:7-25, but the Spirit's benefit of freeing the believers comes "in Christ Jesus." Thus, what the Spirit is able to do for the believers involves Christ as well. Paul's use of his mystical phrase *in Christ Jesus* here indicates that Christ is related to the believers not merely as their outward Savior but more significantly as the realm and condition of their daily Christian life. They are in Christ, and because of this, they enjoy the benefit of freedom from the law of sin and of death. Yet, this benefit comes to them through the functioning of the Spirit of life within them, whose operation is so thoroughly consistent and effective that Paul characterizes it as a law, a natural principle, within the believers and for their experience. This benefit of being in Christ Jesus is applied to the believers through the operation of

the Spirit of life within them; thus, the Spirit can be said to incorporate this benefit within the believers. In keeping with the message of the New Testament elsewhere, Paul indicates that the reality of Christ Jesus and the benefits to be derived from Him obtain through the operation of the Spirit within the believers.

Later in the same chapter Paul elaborates on the believers' experience of the divine life, and ties this experience to the operation of both the Spirit and Christ. Paul's seemingly careless interchange of the Spirit and Christ in verses 9 and 10 has long held the interest—and disputation—of biblical scholars, and a number of attempts have been made to alleviate the Trinitarian difficulties that this interchange may seem to cause. In Paul's defense (if he needs one at all), it is highly doubtful that he understood Christ and the Spirit as one and the same divine person or that he subscribed to what is later referred to as Spirit Christology, whereby the Spirit (as opposed to the Logos) is understood to be that which is divine in Christ. On the other hand, we need not diminish the significance of this interchange and say that when Paul wrote *Christ* he meant *the Spirit of Christ*, which he mentioned in the preceding sentence (cf. Fee 548). Either assessment of what Paul is saying here relies on an assumed lapse of some sort, of theological understanding in the former case or of short-term linguistic memory in the latter. But what if Paul means what he is actually saying, that the Spirit of God that dwells in the believers—the Spirit of Christ that they have—is, in some sense, the Christ who is in them? The terms *the Spirit of Christ* and *Christ* are in such close proximity that it is doubtful that Paul failed to see what he was at least implying. In fact, the terms, in such close proximity, strongly suggest that Paul was trying to make a point here regarding the Spirit of Christ and Christ, and they invite an almost emphatic reading of verse 10: But if Christ is in you—and it is Christ who is in you...

The question here is not whether Paul is confused in his theology or whether he has miswritten; the question is, what is the sense in which Paul identifies the Spirit and Christ? To get at this, we should first note that in this passage what is foremost is not the interchange of divine persons. Paul here is primarily speaking of the reality of the indwelling God as the practical basis for the believers' experience of the divine life as they live in physical bodies that are, from the perspective of God's economy, dead. Through verse 13 of this chapter, Paul offers the answer to the wretchedness of the body of death with its law of sin in the previous chapter, and the answer is the indwelling God who operates as a higher law of life in the believers and frees them from the law of sin and of death. He indicates that there are two realms within the believers—the flesh and the spirit—and the realm that they live in determines the condition

they experience—death or life (v. 6). In verses 9 and 10 particularly, Paul helps the believers see that because of the indwelling God they can be and indeed are in the realm of the spirit and not of the flesh, and that even though death is in the realm of the body, life is in the realm of the spirit. With that in mind, we should understand that the interchange of the divine persons in these verses refers not to separate or even parallel operations by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, and Christ, but one action of God, Christ, and the Spirit, yet so termed so as to bespeak Paul's realization of the respective distinctions in the operation of each. Within the believers the spirit is life because the Spirit of life dwells within the believers, and thus, for the believers' experience of life, it is the operation of the Spirit that is foremost. But according to Paul the Spirit operates in this regard as the Spirit of God and as the Spirit of Christ, and as we have seen elsewhere, we can understand these titles to refer to the Spirit's function to incorporate the operations of God and of Christ. God dwells in the believers not in a representative way through the Spirit's indwelling but by being incorporated in the Spirit who indwells the believers. So also with Christ: Christ in reality dwells within the believers but not apart from the Spirit; indeed, Christ dwells in the believers in reality because the Spirit incorporates Christ's indwelling in His own indwelling of the believers.

We should wonder why Paul sprinkles this passage with these various divine titles. (It can hardly be to irritate his readers, though this has been the effect for some.) The easy way out is to say that he had no real reason to do so and that the interchange is capricious. But there is a clue here which may offer some explanation and absolve Paul of writing arbitrarily. If "the spirit is life because of righteousness," we must look for a source of righteousness in the believers, and we know that for Paul righteousness is not something that is innately within the human being (7:18; 3:9-18). Further, righteousness is not something that is usually ascribed to the operation of the Spirit. Righteousness, insofar as it relates to the believers, is through Christ (5:17, 21; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 2:21; Phil. 1:11), and hence, Christ's operation is strongly suggested by the mentioning of righteousness in Romans 8:10. I believe that Paul clearly understood that since the spirit is life because of righteousness, Christ is in operation in the believers, and he plainly felt that he had to say so. His understanding appears to be more acute than that of the many who see confusion or capriciousness here. It seems that his understanding about the relationship between life and righteousness in the realm of the spirit prompted him to distinguish between the Spirit's operation in the believers and that of Christ. There is but one divine action in these verses; but from the perspective of the realm that the action occurs in (spirit), it is distinctly an operation of the Spirit, and from the perspective of

the righteousness that provides the basis for the divine life in the believers, it is distinctly an operation of Christ. Further, in the next verse (v. 11) we see that from the perspective of the giving of life, by which the believers are ultimately delivered “from the body of this death” (7:24), it is distinctly an operation of God, who raised Christ from the dead and also gives life to their deathly bodies through His Spirit who indwells them. If anything, Paul is respecting the distinctions in the operations of the Triune God, not confusing them or capriciously juggling them, and it seems that the “mechanism” by which the distinct and real operations of the three occur within the believers is the incorporation of these operations by the Spirit who indwells them.

In Philippians Paul speaks of what should be every believer’s earnest expectation, that Christ would be expressed through the believers, and he makes it clear that such an expression of Christ comes through the Spirit’s operation within.

For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. (Phil. 1:19-20)



put to shame by failing to manifest the Christ who lived and operated within him. To his mind, anything short of manifesting Christ visibly “in his body” would have been a shame to him, for he lived, in every situation, to manifest Christ. Paul’s desire was to incorporate Christ’s operation in his every action and to thereby manifest Christ openly to all around him. Conversely, such a living incorporated Paul into Christ, and for this reason he declared that his bonds “have become manifest as being in Christ” (v. 13). Though a believer, Paul was more than a believer there in prison. He incorporated Christ in his living and manifested Christ openly through his physical actions. What this looked like practically, we can only speculate, but we can easily imagine that life in a Roman prison was probably not pleasant, and yet Paul lived in that physical environment in such a way that even the guards, who were no doubt a factor in the harshness of the situation, could see in Paul more than a simple human being. While previously Christ was by reputation foolishness and someone to be dismissed as nobody, through Paul’s physical life in prison, Christ was seen to

Christ in reality dwells within the believers but not apart from the Spirit; indeed, Christ dwells in the believers in reality because the Spirit incorporates Christ’s indwelling in His own indwelling of the believers.

Paul’s aspiration for his Christian life was certainly high and remarkably unselfish. His hope (indeed, his expectation) was that Christ would be magnified in his body. The language here is quite precise. While we might be tempted to understand him to be saying something akin to “that people would know that I am a follower of Christ,” the very graphic phrase *in my body* speaks against it. The phrase compels us to think of Paul’s physical actions, not merely his personal standing as a believer. As he stood there under arrest in Rome and in open view of the imperial guard, he earnestly hoped that all his actions would manifest Christ and that he was in Christ (v. 13). Even if he died there in prison, he hoped to die in such a way that Christ would be clearly seen by all as he experienced death. Paul’s hope and expectation was not simply that he would be known as an adherent of Christ; he was imprisoned precisely because everyone knew that he was an adherent of Christ, even if technically the charges against him were otherwise. Paul’s hope was that in going through his imprisonment, even if it meant finally dying because of it, he would at no time be

be in effect and was enlarged before the eyes of his captors. For Paul, this was his greatest glory, and to fall short of this would be his greatest shame.

However, what is of greater interest to us in these verses is Paul’s comment that this magnification of Christ in his body was through the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul’s utterance in these two verses is rich and packed with many modifiers to express his deep understanding of the realities that he was experiencing at the time, but at the core of his full utterance is this: salvation through the Spirit according to the hope that Christ would be magnified. The salvation that Paul sought is not what we might commonly expect, that is, his release from prison; rather, he sought a transcendent salvation that was according to his deep hope that Christ would be magnified in his body. He desired that the saints in Philippi would pray for this kind of salvation for him, and he understood that their prayers could move God to operate through His Spirit within him for this kind of salvation. But his realization was that this kind of

salvation—the salvation of magnifying Christ—required the operation of the Spirit within him. While it was Christ who was being magnified in Paul’s body, it was the Spirit who was operating within him to actuate such a magnification. Thus, the Spirit’s operation in Paul resulted in the expression of Christ through him, and again we see the Spirit’s basic function to make Christ real within the believers. It is not that the Spirit represents Christ within the believers; rather, what is manifest through the Spirit’s operation is simply Christ Himself. If we must hold to a notion that the three of the Divine Trinity are separate persons and that they cannot all be within the believers at one time (because two of them are off separately in heaven?), then taking the Spirit as the separate representative of God and Christ in the believers would make sense. But if we hold to the view, long held by the theologians of the church even if not recognized, taught, and confessed by its many common teachers, that the three are inseparable and that when one of the three acts, all three operate, then we should understand that when the Spirit acted in Paul, Christ operated through that action and was manifested in Paul’s visible physical living. The Spirit incorporated Christ’s operation, and through the Spirit Paul was able to manifest Christ openly and in reality.

The further confirmation of this matter is in the title that Paul uses to characterize the Spirit here: the Spirit of Jesus Christ. We have seen in the preceding sections that titles such as this point to the Spirit’s unique function to make Christ real to the believers. My contention in this article is that He makes Christ real by incorporation, that in His activities within the believers Christ in reality operates. In a previous article I pointed out that in the actions of His earthly life Christ manifested the operation of the Spirit, as He testified in the Gospels: “If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). I would not expect that anyone understands Jesus to mean that He represented the Spirit when He cast out demons. Rather, I believe that it is easy to accept that when Jesus cast out the demons, the Spirit genuinely was in operation in His actions, that Jesus incorporated the Spirit’s operation in His physical and visible actions. Further, I think it is easy to see that Jesus’ action did not incorporate merely the Spirit’s operation but also that of God the Father, for the effect of His action was the bringing in of the kingdom of God upon those around Him. Jesus acted, and God the Spirit and God the Father operated distinctly for the full effect in Jesus’ action. In a similar way, when the Spirit moves within the believers in the Epistles, we should not expect that He does so separably from Christ and the Father; rather, we should expect that He likewise incorporates the operations of Christ and the Father, and for that reason He is rightly and variously called the Spirit of Jesus

Christ, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Jesus, or the Spirit of God, depending on whose operation He is incorporating in a given context. In the context of his imprisonment, Paul saw fit to characterize the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ, probably in reference to both the humanity and the resurrected state of Jesus Christ. To undergo the sufferings in his imprisonment, Paul needed Jesus’ operation within him as a genuine human being who had suffered in His human life, and for the transcendence of magnifying Him in such a situation, Paul needed Christ’s operation within him as One who had resurrected from the dead and was now ascended and in glory. The one person, Jesus Christ, incorporated in the Spirit, operated within Paul in both a most human and a most resurrected way so that Paul could live a life that transcended mere human imprisonment and magnified the Christ whom He loved and lived for.

One of the deepest experiential passages in the New Testament is found at the end of 2 Corinthians 3, where Paul refers to the believers’ experience of transformation through fellowship with the Lord:

And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:17-18)

Here Paul details the experiential benefit of the New Testament ministry, which comes to the believers through his and his fellow apostles’ service. Unlike the ministry of Moses in the Old Testament, which offered a fading glory on the transfigured face of its minister (v. 13), the New Testament ministry allows its ministers in Christ (v. 14) to gaze upon the glory of the Lord and to be transformed into the same image with an ever-progressing glory. What the apostles do in their ministry is for the believers, and thus, what the apostles experience in their ministry is representative of what the believers can and should experience through the New Testament ministry of the apostles. While the *we* here refers first to the apostles as the ministers of the new covenant, it is no doubt Paul’s intention that the *we* also includes all the believers, who equally can and should enjoy the benefit of the New Testament ministry, particularly its power to transform the believers in Christ into the same image with an ever-progressing glory.

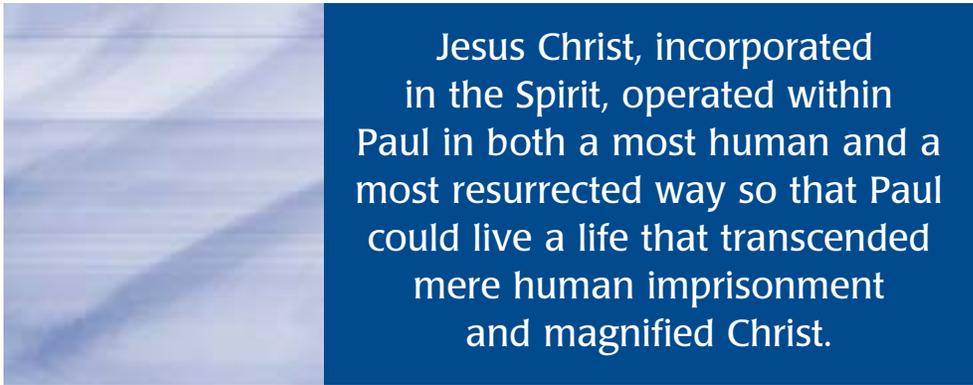
What is important to our discussion here are the words *glory* and *image* and the titles *the Lord*, *the Spirit*, *the Spirit of the Lord*, and *the Lord Spirit*. The image into which the believers are being transformed is that which they behold as the glory of the Lord. What they see through the function of the New Testament

ministry is what they become gradually. The New Testament ministry presents the glory of the Lord, and as the believers behold His glory in the ministry, they are being transformed into the same image, that is, the image of the glorious Lord. The transformation is progressive and is characterized as being “from glory to glory,” and the glory here must be understood to be a glory that expresses the Lord whose glory they behold. The glory of the Lord, therefore, is transferred to them but not in an unfading way, as was the glory on Moses’ face under the ministry of the old covenant; rather, the New Testament believers become bearers of an ongoing glory that continually reflects the glorious Lord and expresses Him unto eternity. This process of glory, Paul tells us, is “from the Lord Spirit,” and for now we can focus on the fact that this transformation in glory proceeds from the Spirit. The Spirit operates in the ministry of the apostles and provides the divine way for the glory of the Lord to be expressed and beheld firstly by the apostles themselves and subsequently by the believers. The Spirit is not directly the glory of the Lord in the ministry nor the cause of glory in it, for the very distinct Greek preposition *apo* (“from”) argues against these notions. Rather, viewing the preposition as spatial in its meaning here (its primary denotation), we should understand that the glory of the Lord proceeds from the Spirit and thus that the Spirit incorporates the Lord in such a way that His glory is manifested by the Spirit’s

operation in the ministry. As we have seen time and time again in the New Testament Epistles, here also the Spirit operates, but the One who is realized through the operation is the Lord, and as we have seen elsewhere, this operation and the reality that is realized through it are the Spirit’s incorporation of the Lord.

The question is, who does *the Lord* in these verses refer to? The commentators vary in their interpretations here. More of them favor Christ as the referent, recognizing Paul’s overall tendency to refer to Christ when he uses the title *the Lord*. But other very influential commentators take *the Lord* as a reference to Jehovah of the Old Testament, since the preceding context refers to Moses’ experience before Jehovah in the Old Testament. There are, of course, problems with either interpretation (and thus the ongoing debate in scholarship to this day). If we understand *the Lord* to refer to Christ, then, say some, we are in essence saying, “Christ is the Spirit” at the beginning of verse 17. This, of course, suggests a modalist view of the Trinity, where-

by the distinctions in the Trinity are merely labels and not divine realities of existence. On the other hand, though the preceding context relies on Moses’ experience in the Old Testament, the Lord (as Jehovah) is not mentioned at all with reference to Moses’ experience in that context. Indeed, when the Lord is first mentioned in this chapter, in the preceding verse (v. 16), the context seems to have changed to the present day (“unto this day,” v. 15). Further, verse 16 seems to echo the thought in verse 14, where Christ is explicitly mentioned: “the veil is being done away with in Christ” (v. 14), and “whenever their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (v. 6). It appears that as we read down the context of these verses from verse 12 and into verse 17, Paul has Christ in mind when he uses the title *the Lord*, and that only through some straining, distant from the natural reading process, could one “calculate” a reference to Jehovah in the Old Testament. Such a calculation is unnatural linguistically, and more than we could expect of the Corinthians and of ourselves as readers and of Paul as writer.



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We cannot ignore the motivation for such a calculated interpretation, which is usually the anxiety that Paul may be saying that Christ is the Spirit. But is there a sense in which Paul is saying that Christ is the Spirit, a sense which respects the real distinctions in the Godhead and yet allows him to make the identification on some level? I believe that there is, and again such a sense relies on the reality that the Spirit incorporates Christ’s operations. The veil is being done away with in Christ, and whenever the heart turns to Christ, the veil is taken away. Thus, the unveiling of the Scriptures, practically accomplished through the apostles’ ministry, is an operation of Christ. But how does Christ operate to take the veil away? He does so in the actions of the Spirit within the apostles first as New Testament ministers and then within the believers as beneficiaries of the New Testament ministry. The Spirit is “the Spirit of the Lord” because the Spirit incorporates the operation of the Lord in His action. But even though the Spirit acts, we should not lose sight of the fact that the veil is taken away through the operation of the Lord. The Lord, who is Christ in the

context, operates, and the believers experience the Lord in operation because the Lord is the Spirit within them, not through an identification that dissolves the distinction between Christ and the Spirit but through an identification that results from the Spirit's unique function to incorporate Christ's operation. The Spirit moves within the apostles and the believers, Christ operates within the Spirit's action, and the veil is taken away from the apostles and the believers. What Paul is saying at the beginning of verse 17 is that Christ the Lord, through whom the veil is taken away, is the Spirit who operates in the believers, in the sense that the Spirit's action is at the same time the operation of Christ, as the action of any of the divine persons is at the same time an operation of the other divine persons. In the next clause of verse 17, Paul clarifies what he means by his reference to the Spirit: the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord; that is, He is the Spirit whose actions manifest, express, and realize the operation of the Lord at issue here.

But what motivates Paul to bring Christ and the Spirit into an identification of this sort? It seems that the realities that he is describing compel him to do so. In verse 18 Paul details precisely how the New Testament ministry differs from that of the old covenant through Moses. Under the new covenant the apostles take the lead to behold the glory of the Lord and are thereby transformed into the same image with ever-increasing glory. In the Godhead both glory and image are borne by the Son as the eternal expression of the Father (2 Cor. 3:7; 4:4, 6; John 1:14; 2 Pet. 1:17; Heb. 2:9; Col. 3:10; Heb. 1:3; Rom. 8:29), and thus, it is particularly because of Christ's operation that the apostles can behold and ultimately reflect the glory and image of the Lord in their ministry. The glory and image that they reflect are not their own; they are Christ as the image and glory of God, whom they behold and reflect in their ministry among the churches. In this context Paul could little avoid referring to Christ since it is Christ who is eternally the image of God and who bears the glory of God. (And again this convinces us that Paul is referring to Christ when he mentions the Lord at the beginning of 2 Corinthians 3:17.) But Paul's point here is not simply that Christ is the image and glory in the ministry of the apostles; he also wishes to make it emphatically clear that what he is talking about is a reality that he and his fellow apostles experience, and this experienced reality is possible because of the Spirit's function to make Christ real to them. The Lord that their hearts turn to, the Lord who bears the glory because He is the image of God, is operating in the Spirit within them and in this sense is the Spirit within them. The Lord is the Spirit because the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord; that is, the Spirit of the Lord bears the Lord to them and makes the Lord as the image and glory of God their reality. It seems that in Paul's understanding the Lord and the

Spirit cannot at all be separated in action: what the Lord as the image and glory of God does can only be realized through the function of the Spirit to make Christ real to the apostles. The shining out of Christ as the image and glory of God in the New Testament ministry and the Spirit's application of Christ's operation within the New Testament ministers are in fact one concrete action, but the operations of Christ the Lord and of the Spirit of the Lord are distinct and respective of each One's unique function in the Godhead. Paul apparently could not speak of either without the other, and his utterance testifies to his full grasp of the unity of the divine action without sacrificing his very fine perception of the distinction between the operations of Lord and of the Spirit.

This leaves us now with only the title *the Lord Spirit* to comment on. The phrase is unique in the New Testament, and because of its striking meaning as such, much has been done to try to avoid the simple reading here. Many commentators and translators have thought it to be an alternative form for *the Spirit of the Lord*. But Paul could have easily written *the Spirit of the Lord* if he had meant that. Others have made attempts to cleave the phrase in two and make of it two appositive nouns—*the Lord, the Spirit*—but such attempts are as equally strained as the attempts to convert it to *the Spirit of the Lord*. Much is done to try to avoid the simple reading here, which is that of a compound title—*the Lord Spirit*. Before dismissing this simple reading, we should try to understand what Paul may have meant by the phrase as such and then decide if there is indeed any reason to suspect that he did not mean what he appears to have meant. Of course, if we suspect, as many have, that Paul does not intend to identify Christ and the Spirit on some level of understanding, then we too should expect that his utterance here is not as well-shaped as it could have been, and we too must try to convert it somehow to something more amenable to the truth, as many have. But in line with the notions we have been examining, it is not at all unusual to find Paul concluding this marvelous passage, in which he has so finely presented both the Lord Christ's function as the image and glory of God in the ministry and the Spirit's function to apply the many divine operations through the ministry (vv. 3, 6, 8, 17), with a reference to both the Lord and the Spirit in function together as the one experienced reality of God. Paul has just pointed out that the Lord to whom their hearts turn in the ministry is the Spirit, and it seems that he explains himself further by pointing out that the Lord is the Spirit because the Spirit is really the Spirit of the Lord. My contention is that the Lord is the Spirit and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord because the Spirit incorporates the function and operation of Christ as the image and glory of God in His (the Spirit's) function and operation to make Christ real within the apostles and the

believers. There is really only one divine reality of action here—the image and glory of the Lord (Christ) shining out in the ministry through the Spirit’s operation—and thus we should not be surprised at all that Paul characterizes this one action as being from one Lord Spirit. The compound title (the simple reading of the phrase) seems to fit the whole message of the preceding context, that the Lord Christ as the image and glory of God operates through the Spirit’s action and that the apostles and believers enjoy the reality of being transformed into that same image of the Lord through the Spirit. It is one God who is in action in the ministry, and Paul’s concluding phrase here sums up in one divine title the one identity of God while respecting the distinctions in the operations of the Lord Christ and the Spirit of the Lord within that one action.

The final group of verses that I wish to examine is drawn, perhaps appropriately, from Paul’s closing words in five of his Epistles.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. (Gal. 6:18)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Phil. 4:23)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Philem. 25)

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. (2 Tim. 4:22)

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)

It is customary of Paul to conclude his letters with the wish and benediction that his recipients would enjoy the divine grace that is available to them. In some of his Epistles he closes with a simple expression: “Grace be with you (all)” (Col. 4:18; 1 Tim. 6:21; Titus 3:15; Heb. 13:25; cf. Eph. 6:24), and in a few more he further characterizes the grace as being “of the Lord Jesus (Christ)” (Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 1 Thes. 5:28; 2 Thes. 3:18). In the first three verses above he not only characterizes the grace as being of the “Lord Jesus Christ” but also makes the striking declaration that the grace is “with your spirit.” These two predications—grace being of the Lord Jesus Christ and grace being with the believers’ spirit—imply the Spirit’s incorporation of Christ’s operation within the believers. *The grace of the Lord Jesus*

Christ should be understood as a reference to the operation of Christ within the believers as the grace that enables them to live the proper Christian and church life. It is not simply something done or given by Christ but is Christ Himself moving within the believers as the divine “energy” for their living. In this sense, the believers can be said to incorporate Christ in their living through His operation within them as grace. But Paul further indicates that this grace of Christ is with the believers’ spirit, and I believe that by adding this notion he indirectly refers to the Spirit’s operation. As we have seen in previous sections, the spirit of the believers provides a nexus for the Spirit’s operation within them, and thus, we cannot help but think that Paul has the operation of the divine Spirit in mind when he directs the believers to their spirit for their enjoyment of Christ as grace. The believers’ spirit is not simply an anthropological distinction for Paul but the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22) in the believer through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling (Rom. 8:9, 11, 16; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14). But within the believers there are not separate



Within the believers there are not separate indwellings by God, by Christ, and by the Spirit; rather, there is one indwelling God in Christ through the Spirit, and this one reality within them is an incorporate reality.

indwellings by God, by Christ, and by the Spirit; rather, within them there is one indwelling God in Christ through the Spirit, and this one reality within them is an incorporate reality, whereby the Spirit incorporates the operations of God and Christ. This is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that is with the believers’ spirit. At the end of 2 Timothy we read that the Lord is with the believers’ spirit, and again the divine Spirit should not be missed in the implication. Because of this, the reference to the Spirit’s incorporation of Christ’s operation in the believers, though still implied, is more direct here than in those verses that speak of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ being with the believers’ spirit. The Lord is with their spirit because the Spirit, who indwells and enlivens their spirit, incorporates the Lord within them. In the final sentence of this verse, the Lord’s indwelling within the believers’ spirit is set in parallel to grace being with them, and again we understand that the Lord is the grace that is within the believers’ spirit and therefore with them. Finally, in his grand benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14, Paul again presents Christ as grace, but here he

conjoins Christ as grace with God as love and with the Holy Spirit as fellowship. Again, these are not three separate divine actions that the believers are encouraged to experience; rather, Paul is viewing one experiential reality in its full triadic operation. What the believers experience as the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing other than Christ's incorporation of the love of God in His own actions; further, that incorporate action becomes experiential to the believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit to make participation in the love of God as the grace of Christ possible and real. The believers experience the one loving, gracious, and communicable God through the distinct operations of the three of the Godhead, but it is distinctly the operation of the Spirit as fellowship that makes God as love in Christ as grace real in their experience through His incorporation of the Triune God within them.

Conclusion

In this article I have examined a number of passages from Acts and the Epistles which detail the Spirit's function to incorporate the operations of Christ. My main interest in doing this is to hopefully demonstrate that in the understanding of these New Testament writers the Spirit is not the separate representative of Christ nor even a kind of alternative presence for a distant Christ, as so many today understand. Rather, according to the utterance of these writers, the Spirit's primary function is to manifest a very present Christ in His various operations, to make Him real in the church and in the believers both in person and in operation. When the Spirit moves, Christ operates; and conversely, when Christ operates, the Spirit functions. For this reason, the writers of Acts and the Epistles, especially Paul, are not shy about interchanging references to the Spirit and Christ in close proximity. Yet it seems that they do not do so capriciously, for we can always see good reasons, based on the accepted distinctions within the Trinity, for their explicit references here to one divine person and there to another. What to us may seem very casual and even arbitrary turns out to be, upon further reading and reflection, very carefully crafted and very profoundly uttered. The impression that we are left with in the passages we have considered is that the writers were motivated by a deep realization that God acts according to His triune being. It seems that as heralds of the truth, these writers often could not help but utter precisely the distinct operations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the divine actions that they described and declared. For them these distinct operations were divine realities that they were intensely aware of, and hence, they freely announced them in their writings. Yet at the same time they understood that what they experienced and wrote about was the action of the one God, not of three separate Gods, and because of this, often the interchange of

Agents in their descriptions of single divine actions appears to many readers today as a blurring of the distinctions among, or even a confusion of, the divine persons. For many who implicitly trust the understanding of these New Testament writers, this interchange of Agents is often recast so as to dispel the apparent blurring of distinctions. But most often such recasting is awkward and unnecessary. For others who doubt the proper apprehension of these writers, the interchange of Agents is simply dismissed as errant. I believe the New Testament writers of Acts through Jude were more acutely aware of the implication of their words than we readily admit and more precisely cognizant of how God actually operates. God is eternally triune in being, and His every action is suffused with this reality. The writers of the New Testament first entered into this newly manifested reality of God's operation; they first met the incarnate God and witnessed that in His every action the Father and the Spirit operated; they first realized that in resurrection the incarnate God, still acting, acted now in the operation of the Spirit within them; and thus, they wrote in a way that respected their realizations borne by their experiences. Our hope can only be that through a careful reading of their testimony we too would be ushered into the same realizations and, more importantly, the same experiences that they present to us, that we too would come to know, experience, and enjoy God in Christ through the Spirit in all our Christian, church, and even human life. 

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