

The Incorporation of the Triune God in the Character and Service of the Apostles (2)

by Kerry S. Robichaux

*Since you seek a proof of the Christ
who is speaking in me.
(2 Cor. 13:3)*

In this article I wish to continue an examination of the ministry of the New Testament apostles insofar as it relates to their incorporation of the operations of God, Christ, and the Spirit in their character and service. My previous article focused on this incorporation in the character of the apostles; here I wish to consider the incorporation of the Triune God in the apostles' service. This article serves as the seventh installment of an ongoing study of incorporation among the divine persons and by the believers (including the apostles) as portrayed in the Gospel of John, Acts, and the Epistles. I hope that I have sufficiently shown in previous articles in this series that the New Testament often describes the operation of Christ and the Spirit as one which Witness Lee has characterized as incorporation (*Issue 21-22, 24-26, 40-42*). By the term *incorporation* Witness Lee (and I) wish to refer to the principle that when any one of the three of the Divine Trinity acts, all three operate. In other words, when any one of the three acts, He incorporates the operation of the other two in His action. What is manifest is the action of the one, but in that manifest action there is the incorporate operation of the other two. Thus, every action of God, of Christ, and of the Spirit is an incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. Even in actions that have been traditionally associated with only one of the three (for example, the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ), all three are in operation in the one manifest action of the one, the one incorporating the operations of all three. Certainly, the distinctions between the three are preserved, and thus, we should rightly understand, for example, that it was the Son of God who became flesh, died for our redemption, and rose from the dead. Yet at the same time we should recognize that in what are distinctly the Son's manifest

actions, the Father and the Spirit operate by way of the Son's incorporation of them in His being and doing. The same is true of the actions of the Father and the Spirit.

In my six previous articles in this series I have attempted to show in detail the textual basis in the New Testament for the principle of incorporation. The Gospel of John is especially rich in showing the incorporate operations of the Triune God in the manifest actions of Christ, and perhaps one example from it will help to more clearly illustrate the principle. In John 14:10 the Lord Jesus says,

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 a third 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. But 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 not only by virtue of His own agency but also through the operation of His heavenly Father, who abides in Him and does His work in Him. The Son's action of speaking, and the effectual benefit of His speaking, occurred because the Father operated ("does His works") in the Son. 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 circumincession (perichoresis). While this one verse shows the Son incorporating the operation of the Father, there are ample verses in the Gospels that show the Son incorporating the Spirit's operation as well (e.g., Matt. 4:1; 12:18, 28; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21) and others that show the Son incorporating both the Father's and the Spirit's operation (e.g., Matt. 3:16-17).

In John 14:10 the Son declares explicitly that in His manifest action of speaking, the Father is operating ("does His works") and that the Father is operating in His speaking because He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Thus, the notion of incorporation is the ideational focus of John 14:10. But in most instances where the New Testament textually indicates the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God, the indication is what I am calling an underlayer, or subtext; that is, the ideational focus of the text in these instances is not usually the incorporation of the Triune God but some other matter, in line with the running narrative or exposition. Thus, instances of incorporation in the New Testament are primarily what we may call background information that usually relates to how the agents in the narrative or exposition do what they do. It is almost uncanny how often the writers in the New Testament characterize the actions of their text agents (which are often themselves) as incorporating the operations of the Triune God. It is safe to say that in many instances the matter of incorporation is indicated almost casually. But that does not detract from the importance of the notion. In fact, that it seems to be so pervasively mentioned, even in a casual way, indicates that the notion was strongly held by the New Testament writers even when it was not apparently important to the actual points that they were making. It is as if they felt compelled to qualify the actions they described as incorporate operations of the Triune God and not merely as

manifest actions of their text agents. I hope that an examination of my previous articles will confirm this observation.

In my first two articles in this series I was mainly interested in the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in the actions of Christ and the Spirit as seen in the Gospel of John, and in the next three articles, as seen in Acts through Jude. In my last article and these that follow, I turn my attention to instances of the incorporation of the Triune God in the life of the New Testament believers, again as seen in Acts through Jude. In determining instances of incorporation by Christ and the Spirit, what I was looking for were textual indications that in the manifest action or function by Christ or the Spirit there is also the distinct operation of another of the divine persons, similar to what was seen in John 14:10: "I say..., but the Father...does His works." In considering instances of the incorporation of the Triune God by the New Testament believers, I am looking for textual indications that in the believers' manifest life and service there is also the operation of at least one of the persons of the

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Divine Trinity, that is, that the believers incorporate the operation of the Triune God in their life and service. As it was with the instances of incorporation by Christ and the Spirit, we find that instances of incorporation by the believers are very often in the background textually. Frequently they are not the ideational focus of the passages we find them in, and they can easily escape our notice or be dismissed as too casual to focus on. But they are supported by genuine textual material, and hence, they deserve our notice. Hopefully, the plethora of instances of incorporation by the believers found in Acts through Jude will affect how we view our life and service as New Testament believers.

As I was reading Acts through Jude, looking for instances of the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God, it was quite easy to distinguish those instances which relate to the actions and functions of Christ and the Spirit from those that relate to the life and service of the believers. But in the many instances of incorporation by the believers, I noticed a complication in texture. A significant number of these do not seem to actually relate to the life,

service, and experience of the common believers. Some of these are particular to the experience of the apostles, and the number of these are not insignificant. Of the total 368 instances that relate to the believers generally, 115—almost a third—appear to relate to the unique experience of the apostles particularly. Paul makes clear that not all are apostles (1 Cor. 12:29), and thus, it seems right to make a distinction among the believers between those who function specifically as apostles and those who function commonly, though not less importantly, as the vital members of Christ's Body in local churches everywhere. This is not to say that the experiences of the apostles have no bearing on what the believers should experience in their own life and service. Indeed, Paul presents himself, an apostle, as a pattern to be imitated by the believers (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thes. 3:9). Thus, the principles we see in the apostles' life and service should be considered as principles that the believers should strive to attain to in their own life and service. But the particular point that I am hoping to establish in this article is that the defining characteristic of the apostles' service is one of incorporation, whereby in their manifest activities for God's economy the divine persons of the Triune God operate. My contention is that it is this incorporated operation of the Triune God that gives the apostles their real worth in God's economy and indeed defines their function as apostles. I will not stray into the question of how apostles function today or even if they do at all. But regardless of the actual status of apostles in the church today, the New Testament presents a very thorough view of the apostles' life and service in their ministry, and as patterns to us all, the apostles should be considered carefully. In my previous article I focused on the character of apostles as seen in Acts through Jude insofar as it relates to the incorporation of the operation of the Triune God. In this article I will focus on the service of apostles as it relates to the incorporation of the Triune God.

I should also make clear that my intention in this article is not to systematically describe the service of the New Testament apostles. Rather, I wish to garner their own testimony (and that of Luke, who presents their acts) concerning the incorporation of the Triune God in their apostolic service, and their testimony does not lend itself to a systematic definition of their entire service. Of course, to give some manageable structure to this article, I must arrange the excerpts discretely and assign categories to like instances. But as a whole, this collection does not serve well as a full definition and description of the service of the apostles in God's New Testament economy, and I hope no one will be inclined to take this collection as such (especially after this preamble). However, I hope that these excerpts will serve well as an indication of *how* the apostles serve in God's New Testament economy, that is, by way of incorporating the operations of the Triune God in their every act. Of course,

not every act of apostolic service recorded in Acts through Jude is described as an instance of the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God. But as we shall see below, very many of their acts are clearly described so, and one is left with the distinct impression that generally when they served, the apostles incorporated the operations of the Triune God. Just as I hope that the many instances I presented in my last article established the principle that in all their living the incorporation of the Triune God was the *modus vivendi* of the apostles, I hope that the many instances that I will present in this article will establish the principle that in all their service the incorporation of the Triune God was their *modus operandi*.

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 as it relates to the service of the apostles. In each group I will arrange the verses thematically and not necessarily in the order in which they appear in Acts and the Epistles.

Incorporation in the Service of the Apostles

In presenting these instances of incorporation in the service of the apostles, I wish to move topically from the general to the specific, reviewing first those passages that characterize the apostles' service as part of their overall function in God's New Testament economy. Then, I will consider other passages that relate specifically to their New Testament ministry as it incorporates the operations of God. Finally, I will present passages that relate to particular activities in their service, again insofar as these are characterized as incorporating the operations of the Triune God.

In Their General Work

For which also I labor, struggling according to His operation which operates in me in power. (Col. 1:29)

For He who operated in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcision operated also in me for the Gentiles. (Gal. 2:8)

In my previous article, on the incorporation of the Triune God in the character of the apostles, I referred to Colossians 1:29 to show that the power that the apostles possessed for their ministry was derived from the operation of the Triune God within them. Here, as we focus on their general work, we should notice again that their labor was not something of their own strength or merely based on their own abilities; rather, their work relied on the operation of God within them, and that

operation gave their work its value and even its intrinsic apostolic identity. They were apostles not because they represented God in their preaching the gospel and in their care for the churches but because they incorporated the operation of God in their service in the gospel and among the churches. There can probably be no clearer reference to the incorporation of God's operation in the apostles' work than Paul's testimony here in Colossians 1:29. Paul concludes an overview of his role in the apostles' ministry (vv. 24-28) with a graphic description of his endeavoring in it. He employs four related terms to show vividly how he worked in the ministry: *labor*, *struggling*, *operation*, and *power*. In Greek the first of these (κοπιῶ) refers to labor with toil, often to the point of exhaustion. The second term in Greek (ἀγωνίζομαι) is metaphorical and refers to the endeavor of athletes in competitions like the Olympic games. The third term in Greek (ἐνέργεια), from which we get our English word *energy*, refers to the inward working (ἐν-ἔργον) of God in Paul's ministry, and in employing it here, Paul uses a Semitic grammatical formula to intensify his expression of this inward working: "His operation which operates in me." The fourth term in Greek (δύναμις), from which we derive words like *dynamo*, *dynamite*, and *dynamic*, refers to power that is inherent in a thing. Put together, these four terms show that Paul labored aggressively and arduously in his ministry, with the endeavor of an Olympian and sometimes to the point of exhaustion, but his labor was propelled by God's operating within him and was powered by the God of power Himself. Manifestly, it was Paul who was laboring, but intrinsically, it was God who was operating within him and providing the inherent strength for his work.

It is interesting to note that Paul viewed the divine operation within him as something common to the other apostles, as indicated by his testimony concerning Peter in Galatians 2:8. Paul makes it clear here that the apostleship that both he and Peter possessed (and, by extension, that all apostles possess) derives from the operation of God within them. Again, I should point out that the Greek word here for *operate* (ἐνεργῶ) refers to God's working within (ἐν-ἔργον) Peter and Paul. This inward working of God, this divine operation, was "for the apostleship"; that is, God worked within Peter and Paul, and this inner working constituted them apostles in God's New Testament economy. Paul certainly could have referred to his and Peter's appointment to be apostles, as we find in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11, and this would have no doubt made his point here just as

validly. But instead Paul refers not to appointment but to divine operation as the intrinsic basis for his and Peter's work as apostles. What he and Peter did in their apostolic service was not validated merely by God's appointment but by His very operation within them. Their service was, in reality, God's operation, and this validated them as apostles even more intrinsically than their certainly valid appointment to this service. Thus, Peter and Paul's service can be characterized as service that incorporates the operation of God for the apostleship.

In the first half of Galatians 2 Paul wishes to make clear that what he received from the Lord for the sake of the Gentiles was as valid as what Peter, who no doubt held special prominence among the apostles, received from the Lord for the Jews. In this early stage of the Lord's move on the earth, what was initially clear was that God's salvation was to the Jews. Salvation to the Gentiles was only accepted cautiously at first (cf. Acts 11:1-18), and an apostleship to the Gentiles, with the gospel preached broadly and churches established liberally among the nations, needed to be brought into fellowship with those

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who had long been apostles before. Paul's trip to Jerusalem was precisely for this purpose, and during his visit he laid before those who were apostles before him the gospel that he had been proclaiming to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2). In relating the history of this trip, Paul calls not only on the content of his gospel but also on the operation of God in him as proof of the validity of his apostleship and that of Peter's. In other words, he calls on his incorporation of God in his service as the mark of his apostleship to the Gentiles, just as Peter's incorporation of God in his service was the mark of his apostleship to the Jews. Because the earlier apostles perceived the divine operation in Paul's ministry, which in verse 9 he refers to as the grace given to him, they gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship and agreed that he and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles, and they, to the Jews.

What is also significant here is Paul's view that the one God was operating in both Peter and him for the apostleship, making their distinct works among the Jews and among the Gentiles one work in the Lord. Paul went to Jerusalem to lay before the apostles there the

gospel that he proclaimed among the Gentiles, but it was not merely the content of his message that made him one with the apostles in Jerusalem. On a deeper level, Paul realized that the one God operated in both Peter and him for their apostleship, and their incorporation of the operation of the one God made them one in their work in the churches among the Jews and Gentiles. Paul's thought here seems to be similar to a thread of thought that runs through 1 Corinthians 12:4-13: there are distinctions of function in the one Body of Christ, but there is one Spirit, one Lord, one God operating in all the functioning members of the Body, making them one Body (vv. 4-6). Further, "the same Spirit," the "one Spirit," "the one and the same Spirit" operates (vv. 8, 9, 11, 13), and this operation of the One in the many makes the many one. In like fashion, there was an apostleship to the Jews and an equally valid apostleship to the Gentiles, but one God was operating in the apostles for each, and this made their service one apostleship. The operation of God in Paul's service was undeniable, and Peter, who was certainly well acquainted with the divine operation in his own service, would have been able to easily recognize the same operation in Paul. It is interesting that Paul did not refer to the content of his gospel as the basis for the extending of the right hand of fellowship by the apostles in Jerusalem; rather, he reports that James, Cephas (Peter), and John perceived the grace given to him and, because of that, extended to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). It is probably the case that Paul here is equating the operation of God in his service with the grace given to him, and if so, a case could be made for viewing the experience and enjoyment of grace by the apostles as an instance of their incorporation of the operation of God within them. At any rate, Paul understood that because he and Peter incorporated the operation of God in their service, they were in one work and should be in one fellowship. The apostles in Jerusalem may not have had the very same realization (the text here is not so direct), but they certainly perceived the grace of God in Paul and Barnabas's service and, acknowledging that, accepted Paul and Barnabas into the fellowship and service of the apostles.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul again ties the experience and enjoyment of grace to the incorporation of the operation of God in his service:

But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)

Prior to this verse Paul presents a catalog of witnesses to the resurrected Christ, among whom the apostles feature prominently. Peter (Cephas) is listed first, then "the twelve" (v. 5). James is then listed as a special witness to

Christ in resurrection (v. 7), perhaps because of his special physical relationship to the Lord Jesus. Finally, Paul testifies to his own witnessing of the Lord in resurrection (vv. 8-9; cf. Acts 9:3-8, 17; 22:6-11; 26:12-18), calling himself "the least of the apostles" and "not fit to be called an apostle" because he had formerly persecuted the church of God. But what he was—an apostle indeed—was because of the grace of God, not merely because of his own, independent actions. He elaborates that his labor as an apostle was so thoroughly imbued with the grace of God that it was not he who labored but the grace of God which was with him. To his fellow apostles, to the saints and the churches that he cared for, and to the unbelievers he preached to, Paul appeared to be laboring, and outwardly his labor outdid that of all the other apostles. But Paul understood deeply that what was outwardly manifest was inwardly empowered by the grace of God, and he credited that grace for the abundance in his labor. It is striking that Paul indicates that the grace of God labored, and one is left with the question then, Who labored in Paul's apostleship? "I labored..., yet not I but the grace of God." God's grace to Paul did not turn out to be in vain, because Paul labored; but in Paul's outward and manifest labor, God's grace operated inwardly to give Paul's labor abundance and apostolic value. Paul could say at the same time that he labored and yet not he because he incorporated the inward labor of grace within him. But one must ask, How does the grace of God labor? If we understand grace as some divine energy proceeding from God to the apostles and the believers, then we probably need to understand labor here in an extended sense. But if Paul actually understood that the grace of God was literally laboring within him (as the text seems to indicate), then we should probably understand that the grace of God here is a reference to God Himself operating as grace in Paul, and if that can be accepted, we see another instance of Paul incorporating the operation of God for his apostolic service.

In Romans 15:18-19 Paul refers to his preaching of the gospel as the incorporation of Christ's work through the Spirit's operation:

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.

Paul can declare that he has fully preached the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum (present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia), but he understands that this tremendous feat was really Christ's accomplishment through him in the power of the Spirit of God. Gordon Fee observes,

The subject of the verb, and thus of the entire clause, is Christ, whom Paul understands to be the one carrying out his own “work” in the ministry of his apostle. Thus, the christocentric nature of this entire passage (vv. 14-33) can hardly be missed...[T]he agency of Christ’s accomplishing this work through Paul is the Holy Spirit, expressed in this case in the fullest way found in his letters, “by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.” (628-629)

What was manifest and visible was Paul’s extensive gospel service, but in reality within Paul’s service was the operation of the entire Triune God. Paul does not say that he accomplished things for Christ but that Christ accomplished things through him. In Paul’s gospel service Christ operated to accomplish His salvation among the Gentiles. Thus, as Paul served, he incorporated Christ’s operation to bring sinners to repentance and obedience of faith, and Christ accomplished His heavenly ministry through him. We should not deprive Paul’s utterance of its apparent meaning and understand him to be saying that he acted as a mere deputy of Christ. Christ Himself indeed accomplished these things, and He did them through His operation within a very cooperative and active Paul. Yet in accomplishing these things through Paul, Christ operated by the Spirit of God, who functioned within Paul as power that was manifested in word and work and in signs and won-

ders. Fee speaks of the Spirit as “the agency of Christ’s accomplishing this work through Paul,” and perhaps he is correct. But the grammatical agent of the entire clause (i.e., the subject, as he admits) is Christ, and hence, it is difficult to assign agency to the Spirit in this passage. Rather, I believe it is safer to say that the manifest and visible action is Paul’s, that the inward operating Agent is Christ, and that the Spirit is the effective means for Christ’s inner agency. The Spirit as the effective means of Christ’s agency here in Romans 15 is analogous to His function in relation to Christ mentioned in Matthew 12:28: “If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Further, Paul refers to the Spirit here in Romans 15:19 in His extended appellation, *the Spirit of God*, referencing the Father and source of the Godhead. Thus, in the Spirit’s function for Christ’s inner agency in Paul’s service, the Father as the source of the Godhead is also incorporated. This complex of manifest action, inner operation, effective means, and ultimate source defines Paul’s incorporation of the operations of the entire Triune God in his gospel service. This gives Paul’s service in the gospel its

divine quality and indeed makes his gospel service intrinsically a work of God. Far from being an itinerant gospel preacher who merely represented God with a message of good news about God’s salvation, everywhere that he went Paul manifested Christ actually working within him through the Spirit’s function as the power of God the Father to bring the Gentiles to God’s salvation. Paul was no mere representative of God but indeed the incorporation of the Triune God for the application of God’s salvation from Jerusalem to Illyricum in his day.

Three additional passages show the incorporation of the operation of God in Paul’s general work as an apostle.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. So then neither is he who plants anything nor he who waters, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s cultivated land, God’s building. (1 Cor. 3:6-9)

As Paul served, he incorporated Christ’s operation to bring sinners to repentance and obedience of faith, and Christ accomplished His heavenly ministry through him. Paul did not act as a mere deputy of Christ. Christ Himself accomplished these things, and He did them through His operation within a very cooperative and active Paul.

And working together with Him, we also entreat you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Cor. 6:1)

My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you. (Gal. 4:19)

In the church in Corinth both Paul and Apollos labored at various times, each functioning according to his gift and measure. Paul initially brought the gospel to Corinth and established the church there over a period of eighteen months (Acts 18:1-11), and later Apollos visited Corinth and helped the saints much through grace (vv. 27-28). In the particular function of each brother, God was operating to cause the growth, that is, to give the work of each one its significant effect in the church. Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 can be construed as three separate activities—first, Paul’s preaching of the gospel, then later, Apollos’s helping much through grace, and finally, even later, God’s causing the growth—but this does not accord with the metaphor that Paul is employing. Rather, in Paul’s preaching of the gospel, God was causing growth in the Corinthians, and in Apollos’s helping them much

through grace, God was causing further growth in them. Thus, God operated not separately and subsequently but simultaneously in the distinct service of each, giving the work of each its real merit and value. Paul implies as much when he says, “So then neither is he who plants anything nor he who waters, but God who causes the growth.” Paul’s planting could have no merit or value in itself but required God’s operation to give it its effect in God’s economy (“the growth”); likewise with Apollos’s watering. Thus, each brother incorporated God’s operation in his service so that his service could have a genuine effect in God’s economy. Without God’s operation within, Paul’s work would have been mere preaching, and Apollos’s work would have been mere teaching; but because they incorporated God’s operation to cause growth in the Corinthian believers through their work, Paul’s preaching was a planting, and Apollos’s teaching was a watering. God’s operation within them made their service what it really was.

Paul goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 3:8 that “he who plants and he who waters are one,” and this confirms that he did not view the work that he and Apollos did as separate actions by individualistic agents. Rather, their work was one work because there was one God operating in the work of each, even though certainly each one worked at different times. Because the apostles incorporate the operation of the one God in their distinct services, their work is one work, and it is God’s work, not in a representative fashion but as a genuine incorporation of His operation in their manifest and visible activities. No doubt, the reward that each will receive depends not simply on the fact that each labored but more importantly on how much each incorporated the operation of God in his own labor. God will evaluate the labor of each, but, as Paul has said, what matters in the labor of each is that God was able to cause the growth, and thus, this should be the standard of His evaluation. What matters in the apostles’ service is their incorporation of the operating God, who through them carries out His economy.

Finally, in this passage Paul refers to himself and Apollos (and I think it is safe to say, all the apostles) as God’s fellow workers, or, as the Greek (Θεοῦ συνεργοί) will allow, co-workers of God. He also calls the church God’s cultivated land and God’s building. These three epithets all imply the incorporation of the operation of God in the service of the apostles. We may normally think of co-workers as ones who labor shoulder to shoulder in a common endeavor, and this was true of Paul and Apollos, viewed only in their manifest service. But to be co-workers of God, particularly in the context of Paul’s preceding comments, means that when Paul preached the gospel and when Apollos helped much through teaching, God operated to cause growth in the Corinthians; thus, each co-worked with God by incorporating God’s operation in his distinct

function. The result of this co-working was a “cultivated land” and a “building” of God, and these metaphors also point to the incorporation of God’s operation in the service of the apostles. There was cultivation and there was building, and Paul says that both were of God. Does this refer simply to possession by God or more deeply to His operation? Again, following the context of his preceding words, we should expect that Paul is referring more deeply to God’s operation to cultivate the church in Corinth and to build it up, not simply to God’s possession of the church that Paul and Apollos served in to make it a cultivated land and a building for God. But God’s operation to cultivate and build up the church did not happen apart from the service of Paul and Apollos; rather, they served by way of incorporating God’s operation to make the church His cultivated land and His building.

In 2 Corinthians 6:1 Paul refers in passing to the service of the apostles as God’s co-workers, this time using the verb form (συνεργῶ) of the noun he employed in 1 Corinthians 3:9. The co-working of the apostles here, after what precedes in 5:20 (“God entreats you through us”), is unanimously interpreted by the English versions as a co-working with God, and again the notion of incorporation should be recognized. The apostles were working together with God not by way of representation but, as Paul describes in 5:20, by way of God operating through the apostles, by way of their incorporation of His operation in their ministry.

In the third passage above, Paul refers to his ongoing work among the Galatians in a metaphorical way as a labor in childbirth. The reference to incorporation is not as direct as in other places, but Paul relates the travail in his work to the bringing forth of Christ in the Galatians, and this implies that in Paul’s manifest action a divine activity was in operation to give it its most significant effect, that is, to “form” Christ in the believers. Paul, a mere human being, could not form the divine Christ in the Galatian believers by his own virtue and work, but God operating in and through Paul certainly could. One cannot discount the importance of Paul’s labor, which he describes in what is probably the most intense of physical terms—human childbirth; but the result of that labor relied on the divine operation within him and was therefore a divine result. That Paul mentions that this travail was something that he was doing “again” indicates that his first work among the Galatians—apparently his bringing the gospel to them—was also a travail in birth, and we can assume that it also had a divine result because of a divine operation within him. In his Epistle to them, Paul travailed in birth again, this time so that Christ would be “formed” in them. This forming again is not the initial “birth” of Christ in the Galatians, by which they were regenerated to become believers and children of God through Paul’s first preaching of the gospel, but their

being brought on to maturity by having Christ fully grown in them (Recovery Version, Gal. 4:19, note 4). “The nerve of this metaphor, which is based on the development of the child in the mother’s womb..., is that Christ should come to full growth, to maturity, in the Christian” (Behm 753-754). That Christ could be so formed in the Galatians depended not merely on Paul’s intense labor but more importantly on a divine operation which he incorporated in his labor.

In the following passage Paul also speaks of his general service as an apostle among the Corinthians as a work that incorporated the operation of the Lord:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, yet surely I am to you; for you in the Lord are the seal of my apostleship. (1 Cor. 9:1-2)

Paul viewed the positive Christian condition among the Corinthians as the result of his work as an apostle to them and as the seal of that apostleship. But both in verse 1 and in verse 2 he characterizes the general work of his apostleship as being “in the Lord” (Gk., *en kyrio*). The phrasing he uses in the two verses is almost parallel, though the English versions do a better job of capturing his utterance in verse 2. Perhaps a more accurate rendering for each statement would be:

[Is] not my work [that] you are in the Lord?

The seal of my apostleship [is that] you are in the Lord.

Paul’s work and the evident token of his work were that the Corinthian believers were now in the Lord. Again, the reference to incorporation is not direct, but I feel that it is nevertheless present. How could the Corinthian believers have been brought into the Lord through Paul’s work if his work did not incorporate a divine operation which gave his work this divine result? When Paul worked as an apostle among the Corinthians, first to preach the gospel, then to minister to the believers for the building up of the church, more than mere human activity was involved and more than mere human result was achieved. The Corinthians were “in the Lord” through his work, and this divine result had to be achieved through a divine operation within him. In this passage Paul is trying to validate his claim of being an apostle at least to the Corinthians. He wants to make clear that his work is more than that of a mere human being, that his work is that of an apostle of Christ. Hence,

he uses the fact of the Corinthians’ being “in the Lord” to show that his work was more than a mere human work; it was a work that had divine result to it, and thus, it was a work that had divine operation in it. The Corinthians were in the Lord because Paul’s work among them as “their” apostle incorporated the operation of God to bring them into the Lord Jesus Christ, and this incorporation of the operation of God was the mark and authentication of his apostleship.

The final passages that show the incorporation of God in the general work of the apostles are drawn from Acts:

And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared the things that God had done with them and that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)

And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared the things that God had done with them. (Acts 15:4)

The Corinthians were in the Lord because Paul’s work among them as “their” apostle incorporated the operation of God to bring them into the Lord Jesus Christ, and this incorporation of the operation of God was the mark and authentication of his apostleship.

And having greeted them, he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry. (Acts 21:19)

These three passages relate the reports given by Paul (and Barnabas in 14:27 and 15:4) of the ministry work among the Gentiles. The first two reports—one to the church in Antioch and the other to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem—describe the results of the apostles’ first journey into the Gentile world; the third report was given to James and the elders in Jerusalem after Paul’s third journey. It seems that these reports were not casual but were given to confirm the validity of Paul’s work among the Gentiles. The first report, to the church in Antioch, confirmed the work of Paul and Barnabas, who had been sent forth by the Holy Spirit through the brothers there (13:1-4). The second report was given after dissension was stirred up in Antioch by some who came down from Jerusalem and taught that salvation required circumcision; the report given in Jerusalem served as a basis for the final decision of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning the requirements of the faith upon

the Gentile believers. The third report, after Paul's third ministry journey, seemed to backfire. While it was readily accepted by James and the elders in Jerusalem, it ultimately ignited suspicions among the Jewish believers that Paul's work among the Gentiles provoked apostasy from Moses (21:21), and to these suspicions James and the elders acquiesced. Luke tells us that in all three reports what was related was not what the apostles did but what God did either with or through the apostles. What is significant here is that the Agent of the things done was understood to be God, even though clearly the manifest and visible actions were those of the apostles. In their actions God was understood to be operating, and it was God's operation that gave their actions the validity that they had. The apostles preached the gospel, and God did His work with them and opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. Through the ministry of the apostles God did things "one by one" (v. 19), and the apostles incorporated His operation so as to give their service its value in God's economy.

In Their Specific Ministry

The service of the apostles is to carry out the ministry of God's new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5-6; 3:12—4:1), that is, the New Testament ministry. In carrying out this ministry, they do not serve independently from God, as even faithful representatives or deputies might. Rather, as we will see from the passages below, they embody God's work to accomplish His economy among the churches, incorporating the operations of the Triune God in their actions as apostles. While not every action of the apostles is recorded as incorporating the operations of the Triune God, the impressive collection of passages below, which do record this incorporation, should help us to realize that in all things the apostles carry out their service by incorporating the operations of God.

Of which [gospel] I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the operation of His power. (Eph. 3:7)

How shall the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory? (2 Cor. 3:8)

That I might be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, a laboring priest of the gospel of God, in order that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, having been sanctified in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:16)

In Ephesians 3:7 Paul says that he became a minister of the gospel according to the gift of the grace of God and that this grace was given to him according to the operation of God's power. Paul was not merely appointed to be a minister (cf. 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11), but more intrinsically, he was constituted with the grace of God and

thereby became a minister of the gospel. As is frequently the case in the New Testament, *the grace of God* may imply incorporation in that grace can very often be understood not merely as virtue that emanates from God and is distinct from Him but as God Himself operating as grace within the believers to empower them to live and work according to His will for His economy. But without a fuller defense of that notion (which should be made someday), we can only suggest that incorporation is referred to in the phrase *the grace of God*. However, that Paul became a minister according to "the gift" of grace emphasizes God's act of giving the grace, and this giving is an operation that Paul incorporated in his experience of God. He sharpens the notion of God's operation in the next clause: "which [grace] was given to me according to the operation of His power." As we have seen elsewhere, the Greek word for *operation* (ἐνέργεια) refers to an inward working (ἐν-ἔργον), and here we see that Paul incorporated this inward working in his receiving grace to become a minister of the gospel. What was working within Paul, what was in operation, was God's power, and like grace in the preceding clause, *His power* should not be understood to refer to an emanation from God but to God Himself working in power. Gordon Fee makes a case for this interpretation of the phrase here in Ephesians 3:7, understanding that the power of God is the Holy Spirit in function, and, thus, that the giving of grace to Paul for his ministry was "made effective by the empowering of the Holy Spirit" (693). Paul became a minister of the gospel by being constituted with the grace of God, and this constituting (i.e., "the gift") was accomplished through the inner working ("operation") of God the Spirit as power within Paul. Hence, to be a minister of the gospel, Paul had to incorporate the operation of God the Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 3:8 Paul calls the ministry of the new covenant, in which the apostles serve (vv. 5-6; 3:12—4:1), "the ministry of the Spirit." The phrase *of the Spirit* suggests a number of possible meanings, as genitive expressions often do. Taken as a subjective genitive, the phrase could mean that the Spirit personally ministers in the new covenant. As an objective genitive, the phrase would mean that in the new covenant the Spirit is ministered to the believers. If we take the genitive as a simple possessive, the meaning would be that the new covenant ministry belongs to the Spirit and thus is governed by Him. The genitive could also indicate that the ministry is characterized by the Spirit. Witness Lee comments that "the reason Paul speaks of the ministry of the Spirit here and not of the ministry of life is that the Spirit is the source, the element, and the sphere of life" (*Life-study* 59). Thus, the Spirit imbues the ministry of the apostles with the divine life, and this stands in contrast to the death that characterized the ministry of the old covenant. Gordon Fee offers this explanation of the phrase: "In context, therefore,

the ‘ministry of Spirit’ means [Paul’s] ministry in Corinth that brought to them the life-giving Spirit” (308). Perhaps what can be generalized from all the possibilities that the phrase can mean (if we wish to do so) is that the New Testament ministry that the apostles carry out is fundamentally wrapped up with God the Spirit and that through their service in this ministry God the Spirit has a way to be present to operate in and enliven the believers. For our purposes here, what is important is that the ministry of the apostles is also referred to as “the ministry of the Spirit,” and this is so because in their New Testament ministry the apostles incorporate the operation and character of the Spirit, particularly in His life-giving function and in distinction to the function of the law in the Old Testament ministry of Moses (v. 7). The Spirit does not function independently of the apostles but rather operates in their ministry to give to it life-giving effect. What distinguishes the ministry of the new covenant (which is the point of Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians 3) is that it incorporates the operation and character of the Spirit, unlike the ministry of Moses, which embodied the principle of law and so resulted in death that it should be termed “the ministry of death” (v. 7).

Paul also refers to the Spirit’s operation in his ministry as an apostle in Romans 15:16. Here Paul employs a rich and graphic metaphor of his service in the gospel among the Gentiles, drawing on the Old Testament priestly service of offering sacrifices to God. Fee warns that “the latent Trinitarianism of this passage must not be missed” (627). The gospel that Paul labored in is “of God” because it takes God as its source and power (1:16). Like the Old Testament priestly service that it echoes, it also takes God as the object of its service; God is to accept and be satisfied with the offering of the Gentiles. In the center of this service is the offering priest, whom Paul identifies himself with. But in identifying himself as “a laboring priest of the gospel of God,” Paul characterizes himself as “a minister of Christ Jesus.” This may be a reference to Paul’s incorporation of Christ’s operation in His priestly service to offer sacrifices to God (cf. Heb. 5:1-5; 10:12), or Paul may be referring to Christ as the content of his gospel and as what his ministry brings to the Gentiles (cf. Eph. 3:8). But generally in the understanding of the New Testament writers, Christ was the fulfillment of the sacrifices offered to God (cf. 5:2; Heb. 10:10), He alone being acceptable to God ultimately. Thus, we probably do better to understand that Paul labored in his ministry to make the Gentiles one with Christ, as members of His Body (Lee, *Crystallization-study* 275-276), and that they,

incorporating Christ, became an offering that was acceptable to God. In this case, the incorporation of Christ by the believing Gentiles is implied. But where incorporation is more clearly seen is in the final predicate of this verse. The offering of the Gentiles to God was “sanctified [made holy] in the Holy Spirit,” indicating that in Paul’s gospel ministry the Holy Spirit was in operation, suffusing Paul’s work with the attribute of God’s holy nature. Without this sanctifying operation of the Holy Spirit, Paul’s work would have been common and unacceptable to God; with it, Paul’s work bore the holy nature of God Himself, which made it an offering that was acceptable and satisfying to God. Paul’s ministry was not common or simply human. His labors were sanctified by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and this sanctifying operation occurred through Paul’s incorporation of it in his gospel work.

In the practical carrying out of their ministry in the gospel of God, the apostles preached the good news concerning Christ everywhere, and their preaching is often described as an incorporation of the operation of

In Paul’s gospel ministry the Holy Spirit was in operation, suffusing Paul’s work with the attribute of God’s holy nature. Without this sanctifying operation of the Holy Spirit, Paul’s work would have been common and unacceptable to God; with it, Paul’s work bore the holy nature of God Himself, which made it an offering that was acceptable and satisfying to God.

God. In the passages below, the preaching of the apostles is presented as the activity of God:

That the Christ would suffer and that He, being the first to rise from the dead, would announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles. (Acts 26:23)

And coming, He announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. (Eph. 2:17)

And because of this we also thank God unceasingly that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but even as it truly is, the word of God, which also operates in you who believe. (1 Thes. 2:13)

The first two passages show that Paul understood that the preaching of the apostles was in reality Christ’s operation to announce the good news to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Before King Agrippa and Festus the governor of Judea, Paul testified that his message was fully in line

with that of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Christ, who would suffer, rise from the dead, and announce light to the Jews and to the Gentiles. Paul identified his preaching of the gospel with Christ's announcing of the light. He saw his work, for which he was imprisoned and was now on trial, as the work of the Christ whom the prophets and Moses had testified to. Thus, in his mind his actions throughout the Roman Empire, including the province of Judea, simply incorporated the operation of Christ to announce light, which had been prophesied in the Scriptures. As he saw it, he was on trial for something that Moses and the prophets said would happen. But while dying and resurrecting were things that Christ alone accomplished, announcing light was something that Christ would accomplish in and through His apostles, and Paul stood there as testimony to that. Paul's detractors no doubt disagreed with his identification, but he saw his work as the incorporation of the service of the long-awaited Messiah. Similarly, Paul tells the Ephesians that after dying on the cross, Christ came and announced peace as the gospel to the Gentiles and to the Jews. In point of fact, Christ came in the apostles' coming, and He announced peace in the apostles' preaching. In every instance when the apostles preached—in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), in Caesarea at the house of Cornelius (10:34-43), in Athens on the Areopagus (17:22-31), to name a few—Christ had come through the apostles and was operating within them to announce peace. Paul viewed the gospel ministry of the apostles as one that incorporated Christ's operation to announce light and peace as the gospel. This work of announcing light and peace to both Jews and Gentiles was, in Paul's mind, first and foremost a work that Christ Himself was commissioned with. But Paul understood that in the practical carrying out of this work, Christ's operation was incorporated in the work of the apostles, and through them He accomplished this aspect of His heavenly ministry.

Writing to the Thessalonians, Paul points out that what the apostles preached was not merely "the word of men but even as it truly is, the word of God" (1 Thes. 2:13). We can easily dismiss this and say that Paul is simply claiming that his gospel is not mere human invention but actual divine truth. However, the fact that this word of God "operates" in the believers suggests that more than mere ideational content is meant here. Again, Paul employs a favorite notion, that of inner working, to describe the word of God, and this leads us to believe that he is not referring to ideas but to divine activity, as we have seen in other places where he uses this verb. What was working in the believers through the word of the apostles was God Himself as Word. Thus, when the apostles preached, God was operating to make their word His word, and the Thessalonians accepted it as such. What the Thessalonians "heard" was the word of the

apostles, but what they "accepted" was the word of God, and Paul thanked God that they perceived what the reality of his ministry was, that God was operating in his preaching. When he and the other apostles preached, they incorporated God's speaking, and His word became their word.

In the following passage, a difficult one, Paul identifies the word that the apostles proclaimed in their ministry with Christ Himself.

But the righteousness which is out of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven?" that is, to bring Christ down; or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of the faith which we proclaim. (Rom. 10:6-8)

"The righteousness which is out of faith" did not require that one ascend into heaven to bring Christ down in incarnation nor descend into Hades to bring Christ up in resurrection. It did not require it when Moses wrote the passage that Paul quoted (Deut. 30:12) nor when Paul and the apostles preached the gospel of the righteousness which is out of faith. Both Moses' word and Paul's gospel pointed to the historical actions of the Son of God to be incarnated and to be resurrected, and faith in these actions amounted to the righteousness by which God could justify human beings. But there is something deeper here in the transition from Christ, whom the believer wishes to bring down from heaven and up from the dead, to the word of the faith, which is near the believer and even in the believer's mouth and heart. It is not that the believer's wish is allayed by a forensic application of righteousness but that the wish is genuinely fulfilled by the word that is now near, in his or her mouth and heart. The word which the apostles proclaimed was not merely a message *about* the incarnation and resurrection of Christ (that is, about the mechanics of God's salvation); it *was* the incarnated and resurrected Christ ministered through their preaching to become the faith within the believer that God could justify. In their preaching the apostles incorporated the Christ who was incarnated and resurrected, and in their service Christ operated as the reality of their word for the faith of the gospel. This Christ, next operating in the recipients of the gospel, became the substance of the faith that God could accept and justify.

In the passages below we see that the apostles viewed their preaching as a service that was intertwined with the operation of the Spirit. Here we are interested in the apostles' self-assessment of their preaching as an operation of the Spirit. In a later section we will examine the narrative examples of the apostles' speaking through the operation of God.

And my speech and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor. 2:4)

Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words. (1 Cor. 2:13)

To them it was revealed that not to themselves but to you they ministered these things, which have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, which things angels long to look into. (1 Pet. 1:12)

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. 3:5)

When Paul brought the gospel to the Corinthians, he did not cater to their natural Greek appetite for philosophy couched in cogent rhetoric. This would have required mere human (albeit high human) skills, and though probably the Greeks would have been persuaded by these, Paul did want his kerygma (“proclamation”) and their resulting faith to stand in human philosophy (1 Cor. 2:5). Rather, in his preaching the operation of the Spirit and power was manifested. To the Greeks, accustomed culturally to recognizing good rhetoric and appreciative of philosophical speculation (traits which, by the way, seem to persist among them to this day), Paul’s preaching and his message manifested something quite unique, the function of the Spirit in power. On the phrase *of the Spirit and of power*, Fee comments,

[This] some see as referring to two realities, “spiritual gifts and miracles.” But for Paul the terms “Spirit” and “power” are at times nearly interchangeable; to speak of the Spirit is also to speak of power. The combination here, therefore, is close to a hendiadys (the use of two words to express the same reality: “the Spirit, that is, Power”). (92)

What the Corinthians heard were Paul’s words, but what they experienced was the Spirit of God in power. This indicates that when Paul was in Corinth (and no doubt when he was anywhere), he incorporated the operation of the Spirit in his preaching so that his preaching would manifest the power of God (v. 5).

Some verses later in this Epistle, Paul again contrasts the

incorporation of the Spirit’s operation in his preaching with the high rhetoric of human philosophy (v. 13). Paul spoke “the things which have been graciously given to us by God” (v. 12), “not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit” (v. 13). Paul’s preaching, in both its message and its utterance, resulted from an operation of the Spirit within him. He was “taught by the Spirit,” and we should expect this to refer not to some formal training (as “words taught by human wisdom” would) but to a spontaneous operation of the Spirit within Paul as he spoke. His preaching, as he mentioned in verse 4, was a demonstration of the Spirit’s operation in power, and because of this, his words were “spiritual words.” Again, Fee provides excellent help on the Greek phrase:

Here for the first time in the corpus [historically considered] we meet the adjective πνευματικός (*pneumatikos* = Spirit-ual), which, as we noted in ch. 2 [pages 28-32], is a possessive adjective referring primarily to the Holy Spirit. (104)

What the apostles spoke was the operation of the Spirit within them, and their words were those of the Spirit. Their preaching incorporated the Spirit’s operation, and this gave their preaching its uniquely divine quality for the furtherance of God’s economy, which was contrary to all that the Corinthians had ever been exposed to.

Fee’s point, made in several places in his massive work on the Holy Spirit in Paul’s letters, is that the adjective *spiritual* is not to be understood as referring to a spiritual quality (as our English adjective does) but to the Holy Spirit Himself. On this point in his second chapter he concludes, “All this is to say that the small case ‘spiritual’ probably should be eliminated from our vocabulary, when it comes to this word in the Pauline corpus” (32). As he notes above, Fee would have us understand that here in 1 Corinthians 2:13 Paul is referring to “Spirit-ual” words, that is, to words of the Spirit, not merely of spiritual quality. As words of the Spirit, they are then words that have dual agency. They are manifestly the words spoken by the apostles, but they are functionally the words of the Spirit. What the apostles spoke was the operation of the Spirit within them, and their words were those of the Spirit. Thus, their preaching incorporated the Spirit’s operation, and this gave their preaching its uniquely divine quality for the furtherance of God’s economy, which was contrary to all that the Corinthians had ever been exposed to.

Peter also understood that the preaching of the gospel by

the apostles was not simply their own word and work. According to him, “those who preached the gospel” did so “by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Pet. 1:12). Their manifest action to preach the gospel incorporated an inner operation of the Holy Spirit and gave their message the quality of divine speaking.

The final passage above is not particularly related to the preaching of the apostles, but it does have to do with what the apostles (and prophets) preached, that is, their understanding in the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). The Spirit’s operation is indicated by the 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 the apostles and prophets. What the apostles 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.

Akin to the preceding, the passages below provide further reference to the incorporation of the operations of God in Paul’s speaking and writing. In these passages Paul is speaking less about the preaching of the apostles in general and more about specific instances of his incorporation of the operations of Christ and the Spirit as he carries out his ministry among the churches.

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

Furthermore, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that even as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God, even as indeed you do walk, that you abound still more. (1 Thes. 4:1)

Now we charge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the things which were handed down to you and which you received from us...Now such ones we charge and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work with quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thes. 3:6, 12)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him fully know the things which I write to you, that they are the commandment of the Lord. (1 Cor. 14:37)

But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my

opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 7:40)

To the Corinthians Paul was ready to give proof of the Christ who was speaking in him (2 Cor. 13:3). When Paul ministered among the churches, the manifest action was Paul’s speaking, but within that manifest action was the operation of Christ’s speaking. Paul did not stand upon his own speaking as the basis for his apostleship; rather, he relied on the incorporate operation of Christ speaking within him, and this was what gave his ministry its intrinsic authority and effect. In essence, Paul was ready to prove that his speaking incorporated Christ’s operation and that that incorporation was what gave his service its authority and effect. And yet Paul does not ask the Corinthians to simply take his word on the matter. Instead, he points out that the Christ who is speaking in him turns out to be powerful within them. As he ministered as an apostle, Paul incorporated the operation of the Christ who was speaking in him, and this Christ simultaneously operated within the believers as power for their going on in their Christian and church life. Paul certainly knew that Christ was speaking within his speaking; he could no doubt sense that his own natural resources fell short and that the operation of Christ within him provided the real effect in his speaking. But Paul called upon the experience of the Corinthians to prove that Christ was speaking in him: “Christ was powerful in the believers while He was speaking in the apostle. This was indeed a strong and subjective proof to the believers that Christ was speaking in the apostle” (Recovery Version, v. 3, note 1). Paul not only incorporated Christ in his speaking but also relied on the believers’ incorporation of Christ in power in their personal experience to prove that his ministry as an apostle was genuinely the work of Christ.

In the next two passages above, from his Epistles to the Thessalonians, Paul asks, exhorts, and charges the believers in the Lord Jesus. These are early instances of his signature phrases, *in Christ*, *in the Lord*, etc. It is widely accepted that these particular phrases originated with Paul, and because they are so original, we should expect that Paul was not referring to a common relationship with Christ when he used these phrases. On the one hand, Paul understood that Christ dwells in all the believers (e.g., Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:10; Col. 1:27; 3:11); at the same time he realized that all the believers are in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27-28; 2 Cor. 12:2). But as original as his “in Christ” phrasing may be, it is very possible that he received the fuller notion of mutual indwelling from the first apostles orally. The mutual indwelling of Christ and the believers is explicitly mentioned by the Lord Himself in John’s Gospel: “Abide in Me and I in you” (15:4; cf. vv. 5-10; 6:56), and it is highly conceivable that Paul latched on to this notion long before John recorded it. But more importantly, Paul

entered into the genuine experience of this notion, and his writings often make reference to it. In writing to the Thessalonians here, Paul did not charge the believers based on the self-authority of the apostles, even though it was the apostles (Paul particularly) who brought the gospel to them. Rather, he tells them that the charge and exhortation are in the Lord Jesus, relying instead on the spiritual reality of his abiding in the Lord. Through such an abiding, Paul's charge is not only that of the apostles but more significantly that of the Lord. Of course, we can reduce this to a mere representation of Christ, as though Paul were simply claiming to be the Lord's deputy, and probably this is how most readers take these "in Christ" phrases. But Paul could have avoided inventing new ways of expressing a simpler notion and simply used more direct phrasing (e.g., ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, "for Christ"), yet he did not. Respecting his special utterance and his understanding concerning abiding in Christ elsewhere in his writings, we should take his utterance here at face value and understand that the apostles charged the believers out of the reality of living in the Lord; that is, when they charged the believers, they lived out the reality of the Lord operating within them to make the charge. Thus, for Paul to say, "We charge...in the Lord Jesus Christ," is for him to say that the apostles incorporate the operation of the Lord Jesus Christ within their charge and bring to the fore the reality of Jesus Christ as the Lord, who has the real authority in the church. This authority is incorporated into the ministry and service of the apostles (cf. Matt. 28:18-20).

In 1 Corinthians 7:40 Paul offers his opinion on widows' remarrying, saying that they are more blessed if they remain in their unmarried state (cf. v. 8). Then, after offering this opinion, he comments, "But I think that I also have the Spirit of God." In so saying, he indicates that even in offering an opinion, the Spirit of God is in operation within him and that his opinion is an incorporation of that operation. Witness Lee provides this insightful note on Paul's comment:

In v. 10 the apostle said, "I charge, not I but the Lord." In v. 12 he said, "I say, I, not the Lord." In v. 25 he said, "I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion." Here he says, "according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." All these words indicate the New Testament principle of incarnation (that is, that God and man, man and God, become one). This differs drastically from the principle of Old Testament prophecy (that is, that man speaks for God). In the Old

Testament the word of Jehovah came upon a prophet (Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:3), the prophet being simply the mouthpiece of God. But in the New Testament the Lord becomes one with His apostles, and they become one with Him; thus, the two speak together. His word becomes their word, and whatever they utter is His word. Hence, the apostle's charge was the Lord's charge (v. 10). What he said, though it was not spoken by the Lord, still became part of the divine revelation in the New Testament (v. 12). He was one with the Lord to such a degree that even when he gave his own opinion, not the commandment of the Lord (v. 25), he thought that he also had the Spirit of God. He did not claim definitely to have the Spirit of God, but he *thought* that he *also* had the Spirit of God. This is the highest spirituality; it is based on the principle of incarnation. (Recovery Version, v. 40, note 2).

Witness Lee's earlier observation here about the principle of incarnation is not at all at odds with his later insight concerning the incorporation of the operations of God (*Issue 21-22, 24-26, 40-42*). "God and man,

While Paul does not wish to equate his opinion with the commandment of the Lord, at the same time he must admit that his opinion in these particular matters has its source in something other than his own thoughts about them. He senses in his spirit the Spirit of God as the ultimate confirmation of his thoughts on these matters.

man and God, become one," as the principle of incarnation suggests, can be more discretely understood as the incorporation of the operation of God when that principle is viewed in action, as it is here, when Paul offers his opinion in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul's opinion incorporates the operation of the Spirit of God but in a strikingly different way from how the Old Testament prophets were involved with the Spirit. With Paul the operation of the Spirit is intrinsic to his spiritual being and pervades even his opinion about matters. There are certainly times when he clearly repeats the commandments of the Lord (v. 10; 14:37), and there are times when he opines (7:25, 40), but his opinion is not merely his own concept. While he does not wish to equate his opinion with the commandment of the Lord, at the same time he must admit that his opinion in these particular matters has its source in something other than his own thoughts about them. He senses in his spirit the Spirit of God as the ultimate confirmation of his thoughts on these matters. As Witness Lee says, "This is the highest spirituality." Paul can give his opinion even when he has no commandment from the Lord (v. 25), but his sense within is that in his opinion the

operation of the Spirit of God is incorporated. This gives his opinion in these matters the force of God's word, as it ultimately becomes in the New Testament.

In 2 Corinthians Paul devotes much space to the New Testament ministry of the apostles (2:12—7:16), and in the four passages below, he offers vivid descriptions of the functions of their ministry and indicates that in these functions the apostles incorporate the operations of God.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ and manifests the savor of the knowledge of Him through us in every place. (2 Cor. 2:14)

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)

In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them...Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:4, 6)

But all things are out from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and has put in us the word of reconciliation. On behalf of Christ then we are ambassadors, as God entreats you through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:18-20)

In my previous article I offered 2 Corinthians 2:14 as the first passage to describe the incorporation of Christ in the general character of the apostles. Here Paul relies on the image of the triumphal procession of a conquering general to express how the apostles are presented to the world in which they travel and serve. They are captives led by God in triumph over His enemies, and He leads them "in the Christ"; that is, Christ incorporates the operation of the triumphant God to lead the apostles in their gospel move. That the apostles are a fragrance of Christ (v. 15) indicates that in general character they exude Christ wherever they go. The impression that they leave on people is not of themselves but of Christ. But Paul is not only referring to the general character of the apostles here. He is describing, in rich metaphor, the function of the apostles to manifest the knowledge of Christ in their ministry. And while this is certainly what the apostles did, what Paul actually says here is that it was God who manifested this knowledge and that it was through the apostles that He did so. In Paul's view, the

function of the apostles to manifest the knowledge of Christ everywhere was, in fact, an operation of God in Christ. The apostles did not serve as independent agents of God, traveling about and speaking concerning Christ; rather, in their move and service, God led them and manifested in them the knowledge of Christ to all. In what is no doubt the primary function of their ministry, the apostles incorporate the operation of God to make the knowledge of His Son manifest to a needy world.

A few verses later, Paul tells the Corinthians that they are a letter of Christ ministered by the apostles (3:3). This letter, he says, is "inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God." 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. As they ministered to the churches, what was manifest and visible was their shepherding and teaching function, but the effect of their function was that the Spirit was inscribed into the hearts of the believers. In the function of the apostles the Spirit had the way to operate because the apostles incorporated the Spirit's operation in their apostolic service. It can further be said that when the Spirit operated in the apostles' service, He incorporated the operation of Christ because, Paul says, what was ministered was a letter of Christ. Through the ministry of the apostles, the Spirit was inscribed into the hearts of the Corinthians, and the result was a letter not of the Spirit but of Christ. The Spirit's operation in the ministry of the apostles was to bear the reality of Christ into the hearts of the believers. Finally, it should be noted that Paul refers to the Spirit here by the very full title *the Spirit of the living God*, and this is itself a reference to the incorporation of the operation of the living God in the Spirit's function. The living God, who writes in human hearts and not in tablets of stone, operated through the Spirit in the ministry of the apostles; in other words, the Spirit incorporated the operation of the living God as the ultimate Author of the letter which the Corinthians became. The metaphor here, therefore, describes incorporation on several levels and involves the operations of the Triune God in His three distinct persons in the ministry of the apostles. The living God as the Author inscribed Christ as the content through the Spirit as the element in the service of the apostles, who ministered this triune operation into the Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul describes the preaching of the gospel by the apostles as the operation of God within them to shine forth for the illumination of the knowledge of Christ, who is His image. In verses 4 through 6 Paul's utterance is markedly complex, and multiple levels of

incorporation are indicated. In verse 4 Paul characterizes the gospel as having an illuminating function, and what is illuminated is the glory of Christ as the image of God. As the image of God, Christ manifests God not by way of reflection or representation (as tritheism would dictate) but by way of incorporating the Father in His being. Christ embodies God and manifests Him. The gospel functions to illuminate the glory of this Christ, and at first blush, we might think that this refers to its mere message. But Paul is instead speaking about a shining forth that can be found in the preaching action of the apostles. Some people see it and are saved; others are blinded by the god of this age in their thoughts, and there is no shining on them. In the preaching of the apostles, then, there is more than message; there is shining forth, and in verse 6 Paul makes it clear that it is God who shines forth in their preaching. Within the apostles, in their hearts, God operates as a shining, and in their preaching they manifest this shining so that they are able to openly illuminate “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The apostles, then, incorporate the shining God in their preaching, and because of this, they are able to bring God to light among those who are being saved. Yet as Paul puts it, this is not a direct illumination of God but an illumination of “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Here again, as in verse 4, God is expressed in glory by Christ, and Paul’s unique expression *in*

the face of Jesus Christ indicates that Christ does not merely represent the glory of God but, more deeply, bears in His person the manifestation of God in glory. Christ incorporates God in His being, and so He is God’s glory. (It should be noted that the Greek word for *face* here is the same word for *person* in 2 Corinthians 2:10 and that it can also bear the meaning of “person” here.) When the apostles preached the gospel, within them a divine operation took place, and this operation illuminated Christ, who bears in His person by a deeper incorporation the glory of God.

In the final passage above, which is the final passage of this rather long section on incorporation specifically in the ministry of the apostles, Paul shows that the ministry of the apostles is a ministry of reconciliation whereby they incorporate the operations of God in Christ to reconcile the world to God. Based on Christ’s redemption, we who have believed in Christ have been reconciled to God (Rom. 5:8-11), and the reconciliation that we enjoy is presented by Paul as an operation of God that was incorporated in Christ’s actions to die on the cross (2 Cor.

5:18-19). When God “reconciled us to Himself through Christ,” what is manifest is the action of Christ going to the cross to die, but Paul perceived the deeper operation of God and characterizes Christ’s action more finely: “namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them.” Christ’s action to incorporate the operation of God is clearly expressed here in relation to the reconciliation of the world to God. But God did more than reconcile the world to Himself through His incorporation in Christ; He also gave the apostles the ministry of reconciliation, so that the reconciliation that He obtained through and in Christ’s incorporation could be declared and applied to all those who believe in Christ. Here where Paul describes the incorporate action of God in Christ to reconcile the world, he also testifies that God has given the apostles the ministry of reconciliation, the word of reconciliation, through and in Christ. “God in Christ” was not only reconciling the world but also putting in the apostles the word of reconciliation, as the parallel grammatical structure of the Greek sentence indicates here. Because of this, Paul can say that God was entreating the

God was entreating the believers through the apostles. As they preached, God operated in a way of incorporation—with the apostles speaking the word of reconciliation as the gospel and the teaching in the church, with Christ operating in their speaking to reconcile the hearers to God, and with God operating in Christ to reconcile them to Himself.

believers through the apostles. As they preached, God operated in a way that again involves levels of incorporation—with the apostles speaking the word of reconciliation as the gospel and the teaching in the church (cf. v. 20), with Christ operating in their speaking to reconcile the hearers to God, and with God operating in Christ to reconcile them to Himself. Apart from this incorporation the actions of the apostles would have no efficacy and thus no merit, and apart from this incorporation Christ, according to His very existence in the Godhead, could not accomplish the reconciliation of the world to God.

In Their Various Activities

I have spent the greater part of this article reviewing passages that show the apostles’ incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in their general work and in their specific ministry because in these passages the apostles (and particularly Paul) comment directly on their service as apostles and offer self-assessments of that service that point strikingly to incorporation. These are

first-person evaluations that uncover how the apostles viewed their service and why they considered their service a critical factor in God's economy. The short of all that has been reviewed thus far is this: because the apostles incorporated the operations of the Triune God in their service, their service was in fact the work and ministry of God in Christ as the Spirit in the gospel among the unbelievers and in the New Testament ministry in the churches. In what remains of this article, I will review an almost equal number of passages, mostly drawn from the book aptly called the Acts of the Apostles, that show the incorporation of the operations of God in the various activities of the apostles. Almost all the passages are third-person accounts (mainly Luke's) of the apostles' activities that incorporate the operations of God, and generally the evidence of incorporation is casual and in passing. However, although these passages do not invite the same depth of analysis as those that offer the self-evaluations of the apostles, they nevertheless provide further evidence that when the apostles served, they did so by incorporating the operating God into their service, thus giving it its real value in God's economy.

Before ascending into heaven, the Lord Jesus commissioned His chosen apostles to be witnesses to all the earth and indicated that in their witnessing they would incorporate the operation of the Holy Spirit, which they indeed did.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him. (Acts 5:32)

The apostles were not mere forensic witnesses, providing eyewitness testimony to what had occurred in the past. Rather, they were living testimonies of the reality of Christ's incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension as Lord of all because they bore the Holy Spirit as the reality of Christ (cf. John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6) and manifested His power in their actions. This was the promise of the Father (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4) that was eventually fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (2:33), and through the power of the Holy Spirit operating in them, the apostles were able to provide testimony that incorporated the divine presence before all. In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus indicated that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and because of this, they would become His witnesses to the uttermost part of the earth. Later, when Peter and the apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin in Acts 5, Peter made it clear that in their testimony to Christ (actually, to God's operation

upon Christ—vv. 30-31), both God and the Holy Spirit operated (v. 32). When the apostles offered their testimony to the people, the Holy Spirit moved in their speaking as a co-witness, and God operated as well, to give the Holy Spirit to those who heeded the testimony of the apostles and obeyed the gospel. Two particular instances of this are recorded in the passages below—the first, related to the Jews at Pentecost; and the second, recounted three times, related to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius:

And Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word. (Acts 10:44)

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as also on us in the beginning. (Acts 11:15)

And God, the Knower of hearts, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit even as also to us. (Acts 15:8)

Further, in a number of places in Acts, Luke reports that when the apostles spoke, God operated in their speaking to give to it its power and validity:

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which were distributed; and it sat on each one of them; 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. (Acts 2:3-4)

And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings and grant Your slaves to speak Your word with all boldness...And when they had so besought, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:29, 31)

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders. (Acts 4:8)

But Saul, who is also Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said... (Acts 13:9-10)

Being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and announcing in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (Acts 4:2)

Therefore they spent a considerable amount of time speaking with boldness in the Lord, who testified to the word of His grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands. (Acts 14:3)

The propagation of the gospel through the apostles' ministry was initiated on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, and this initiation was accomplished through the incorporation of the Holy Spirit in the speaking of the apostles, as Acts 2:3-4 indicates. Ignoring the controversy that surrounds these verses, we can at least admit what the text offers at face value, that the apostles "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak...even as the Spirit gave to them to speak forth." Thus, their speaking was not merely their own action but the operation of the Holy Spirit that had been poured out (v. 33). Later, in chapter 4, Luke gives an account of prayer made by the persecuted early church (v. 29), and at the conclusion of that prayer the Holy Spirit filled all the believers, who then began to speak the word of God with boldness (v. 31). It is perhaps safe to say that the apostles took the lead in this speaking (v. 8), and thus, here also is an instance of their incorporation of the Spirit's operation in their service. Likewise, in Acts 13:9-10 Saul, who here is first referred to as Paul, spoke with great authority through the operation of the Holy Spirit, who filled him. In Acts 4:2 the apostles are reported to have been teaching and announcing in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. *In Jesus* should be understood to modify *announcing* and to indicate that the apostles' preaching was "in the power (with the nature and character) of" Jesus (Recovery Version, v. 2, note 1). As they proclaimed the resurrection from the dead, they did not simply offer the message that Jesus is the prototype of the resurrection, though indeed He is, but they presented this message as ones who incorporated the power, nature, and character of the resurrected Jesus in their speaking. Finally, in Acts 14:3 Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabas spoke with boldness in the Lord and that the Lord attested to their word by granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands. There are two indications of the apostles' incorporation of the Lord's operation here. First, their speaking to the Jews and Gentiles in Iconium, which took on greater intensity after it was opposed by the Jews (v. 2), was with a boldness drawn from the operation of the Lord within them. Then, to further validate their word, the Lord operated in the manifest actions of the apostles to perform the signs and wonders that were accomplished through them.

In Acts 8 and 19 there are two accounts of special instances of the Holy Spirit's coming upon groups of new believers, in Samaria and Ephesus, and each of these instances occurred through the apostles' incorporation of the Holy Spirit's operation.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit...Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. But when Simon saw that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the Spirit was given... (Acts 8:14-15, 17-18)

And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19:5-6)

In both cases what is manifest is the actions of the apostles to lay their hands on the believers, but from the divine perspective what is actually happening is the operation of the Holy Spirit. The laying on of the apostles' hands brought the new believers into identification with the church as the Body of Christ, and in their function as leading members of the Body, the Holy Spirit operated to come upon the new believers economically and join them

In both Ephesus and Samaria the actions of the apostles to lay their hands on the believers was actually an operation of the Holy Spirit. The laying on of the apostles' hands brought the new believers into identification with the church as the Body of Christ, and the Holy Spirit operated to come upon the new believers economically and join them to the Body.

to the Body. In both cases the apostles' incorporation of the operation of the Holy Spirit had visible effects: in Ephesus the believers spoke in tongues and prophesied, and in Samaria the giving of the Spirit was visible to those there. What is important to note here is that the apostles' action and the Spirit's operation, though certainly distinct, are not separate phenomena; rather, the Spirit operated in and through the apostles' action, and thus, one incorporate phenomenon occurred.

A striking characteristic of the early apostles' service was their ability to heal the sick and perform other signs and wonders, but certainly in all cases this ability did not derive from themselves but from their incorporation of the operation of God in their service, as these particular accounts make clear:

But Peter said, Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk. And he seized him by the right hand and raised him up; and instantly his feet and ankles were made strong. (Acts 3:6-7)

And when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, Men of Israel, why are you marveling at this? Or why are you gazing at us, as though by our own power or godliness we have made him walk?...And upon faith in His name, His name has made this man strong, whom you behold and know; and the faith which is through Him has given him this wholeness of health before you all. (Acts 3:12, 16)

And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings and grant Your slaves to speak Your word with all boldness, while stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may take place through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30)

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders took place among the people...So that they even carried the sick out into the streets and placed them on cots and mats, in order that when Peter came, at least his shadow might overshadow some of them. And the multitude from the cities surrounding Jerusalem also came together, carrying the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits, for such ones were all being healed. (Acts 5:12, 15-16)

And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise up and make up your own bed. And immediately he rose up. (Acts 9:34)

Therefore they spent a considerable amount of time speaking with boldness in the Lord, who testified to the word of His grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through their hands. (Acts 14:3)

And God did works of power of no ordinary kind through the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and their diseases left them, and the evil spirits went out. (Acts 19:11-12)

And the father of Publius was lying down sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him, and having prayed and laid his hands on him, healed him. And when this happened, the rest also in the island who had sicknesses came to him and were healed. (Acts 28:8-9)

These extraordinary functions of the apostles all depended on the operation of God in their actions. Peter told the lame beggar at the temple door that what he had to give was not money but the ability to incorporate God's operation in his command and action to have the beggar rise up and walk. He spoke the command and pulled the man up, and in his actions Jesus Christ the Nazarene operated to make the beggar's feet and ankles strong (3:6-7), so that he could walk for the first time in his life. Peter later testified that what had happened was nothing of the apostles' own power or godliness but that

the name of Jesus and the faith which is through Him had made the beggar whole (vv. 12, 16). The name of Jesus and the faith through Him must be understood as references to divine operations that were distinct from the manifest actions of the apostles, operations that the apostles incorporated in their actions to heal the beggar. In Acts 4:29-30 the apostles with the church in Jerusalem prayed that the Lord would stretch out His hand to heal and accomplish signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. These divine operations were to take place through the hands of the apostles, and indeed they did, as recounted in Acts 5:12, 15-16. While it was the apostles who "performed" these many signs and wonders and through whom many, sick and troubled by unclean spirits, were being healed, it was actually the Lord who stretched out His hand to heal and accomplish these signs and wonders. The Lord operated in the actions of the apostles, by way of incorporation, to accomplish these wonders. In Acts 9:34 Peter again incorporated the operation of Jesus Christ to heal the lame Aeneas. Linguistically, the present tense here codes a performative speech act (as, for example, the present tense in "I now pronounce you man and wife" performs the action of marrying a man and a woman). Peter made the declaration, "Jesus Christ heals you," and indeed, Jesus Christ healed Aeneas. Peter incorporated the operation of Jesus Christ in his words, and Jesus Christ healed Aeneas. We previously examined Acts 14:3 in relation to the apostles' incorporation of the Lord's operation in their speaking with boldness, and we also noted then that the Lord further operated in their actions to perform signs and wonders. In Acts 19:11 Luke tells us that "God did works of power of no ordinary kind through the hands of Paul," indicating again that Paul incorporated the operation of God in his actions to perform these works of extraordinary power (v. 12). Finally, as he neared his final destination of Rome, Paul incorporated the operations of God to heal the father of Publius and others who were sick on the island of Malta (28:8-9). Genuine healings and genuine works of power through the Lord Jesus Christ are actually instances of the incorporation of the operation of Christ in the manifest actions of those through whose hands these works occur.

The last group of verses for this article present some isolated instances of the apostles' incorporation of the operations of God in their care for the local churches. All these examples involve Paul's service and show his intimate care for the churches that God raised up through him.

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be established. (Rom. 1:11)

For I, on my part, though being absent in the body but present in the spirit, have already judged, as if being present, him who has thus done this, in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you and my spirit have been assembled, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Cor. 5:3-5)

For even though I am absent in the flesh, yet in the spirit I am with you, rejoicing and seeing your order and the solid basis of your faith in Christ. (Col. 2:5)

But whom you forgive anything, I also forgive; for also what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, it is for your sake in the person of Christ. (2 Cor. 2:10)

When he was in Miletus and met with the elders from Ephesus, Paul gave them an intimate word on his service among them and the trials that he knew would come to them (Acts 20:17-38). The church in Ephesus came into existence and was built up directly through Paul's ministry (18:19; 19:1-41), and we should expect that Paul had appointed the elders whom he addressed later in Miletus, since the apostles appointed elders in the churches that they established (14:23). Yet in his word to the elders of Ephesus he said that the Holy Spirit had placed them as overseers in the church (20:28). Thus, in their service of appointing elders, the apostles incorporated the operation of the Holy Spirit.

To the Romans Paul expressed his desire to come to them and impart "some spiritual gift" (Rom. 1:11). Recalling Fee's comments that the Greek word for *spiritual* is always primarily a reference to the Holy Spirit (32, 104), we should understand here that Paul is referring to a gift that involves the Spirit's operation. Paul hoped to go to Rome and impart the Spirit's operation through his service there. This would be the incorporation of the Spirit's operation in his service.

In 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 Paul speaks of being absent in the body but present in the spirit as the believers gathered in the church. Further, he says that they and his spirit assembled there in Corinth. These are not words to easily understand, probably because they refer to an experience that few of us actually have. While we should not dismiss these words or try to reduce them to references to less significant experiences, perhaps all we can safely say here is that what Paul did from a distance in the spirit was something that he did through the operation of the Holy Spirit. There is one Spirit that operates in the one Body of Christ, as he says later in his first Epistle to the Corinthians and elsewhere (12:11, 13; Eph. 4:3-4), and through the one Spirit, which was mingled with Paul's spirit and with the spirits of the Corinthian believers (Rom. 8:4-6, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17), Paul was able to participate,

in a real way, in the actions of the Corinthians. Further, the specific action of Paul and the Corinthians to deliver the sinful brother for discipline was "in the name of our Lord Jesus" and "with the power of our Lord Jesus." Thus, as Paul and the Corinthians experienced the one uniting operation of the Spirit, the Spirit manifested in power the operation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this incorporation by the Spirit gave their action the force of an action by the Lord Jesus Himself. In all, Paul is referring to a deep and intricate experience of the incorporation of the operations of God. Paul refers to a similar though less complex experience in Colossians 2:5, where again he notes that even though he is physically absent from a local church, he is nevertheless present with them in the spirit. It is quite striking that Paul goes so far as to say that he could see their order and the solid basis of their faith. However this was possible, it happened only through the incorporation of the Spirit's operation in his spirit as he communed "Spirit-ually" with the church in Colossae.

Finally, we conclude with 2 Corinthians 2:10, a very intimate expression of Paul's relationship not only to a local church but more significantly to the Christ he served. Paul joined the church in Corinth in forgiving the sinful brother whom he and the church had previously delivered to Satan for discipline (1 Cor. 5:5), but he points out that he forgave "in the person of Christ." This mystical phrase refers to his incorporation of Christ in this action. Witness Lee offers this excellent comment on the word *person* here in this phrase:

Lit., face; as in 4:6. The part around the eyes; the look as the index of the inward thoughts and feelings, which shows forth and manifests the whole person. This indicates that the apostle was one who lived and acted in the presence of Christ, according to the index of His whole person, expressed in His eyes...In [2 Corinthians] we see a person who lived Christ according to what he wrote concerning Him in his first Epistle, in the closest and most intimate contact with Him, acting according to the index of His eyes; a person who was one with Christ, full of Christ, and saturated with Christ; a person who was broken and even terminated in his natural life, softened and flexible in his will, affectionate yet restricted in his emotion, considerate and sober in his mind, and pure and genuine in his spirit toward the believers for their benefit, that they might experience and enjoy Christ as he did for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose in the building up of Christ's Body. (Recovery Version, 2 Cor. 2:10, note 3)

As one who lived and acted in Christ's constant presence, who was one with Christ, and who even lived Christ in his service among the churches, Paul did things through the operation of Christ within him. When he forgave this

brother, he did so by living out the person of Christ, who within him was the ultimate and most significant source of the forgiveness. In incorporating the operation of Christ in his forgiving, Paul as the apostle to the Corinthians fully restored the repentant brother to the fellowship of the church there.

* * *

In what has preceded in this and my previous article, I hope that I have adequately shown, from the testimony of Luke and of the apostles themselves, that the apostles are not mere deputies of God who represent Him on the earth but ministers of God who incorporate His actual operations in their life and service. Contrary to any natural concept about Christian service, they do not do things *for* God; rather, they manifest what God is doing through them, and thus, what they do is God's actual operation. In their testimony they frequently reject the notion that their life and service as apostles are something of their own virtue, godliness, power, and being, and they readily, though often casually, confess that it is God, Christ, or the Spirit who is the significant factor in their life and who does the significant work in their service. The acknowledgement of their incorporation of God is no mere rhetoric but the genuine testimony of ones who lived in the reality of experiencing the operation of God in their life and service. Their ways of expressing this incorporation have by now pervaded the ways in which Christians speak today (e.g., "my brother in Christ"; "I love you in the Lord"; "in Jesus' name we pray"; and so on), but their utterances were drawn from realities in their life and service that they as apostles genuinely experienced and newly pioneered. Admittedly, the characteristic of incorporation in the apostles' life and service can escape our notice today, especially in view of the meanings that have since been loaded onto their ways of expressing it. But if we attend carefully to this detail, as we have in these two articles, we begin to realize that the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God is not an accidental or incidental characteristic of the apostles; it is, in fact, what defines them as apostles in life and service. Without this, the apostles would be mere human beings who act for and independently of God, as many so-called (and false) apostles do today; with this, the apostles are agents of God's operation, doing what God is doing within them and living out what God is within them. This is what gives their life and service a genuinely divine factor that sets it apart from mere human activity. If we accept the testimony of the apostles to denounce credit in themselves for their ministry and to attribute the intrinsic value and effect of their ministry to the operation of God within them, we understand that it is this operation, and not their outward activity, that defines them as apostles of God.

Today we approach the matter of apostles gingerly, and probably rightly so, as under the wrong concept and by the wrong persons the function is easily abused, to the detriment of all. But we make a mistake if in our concept we uplift the function of the apostles so highly as to be beyond our experience today. The apostles, according to their own estimation, as we have seen, are at most the first among us in life and service in God's economy. Certainly they have a special portion that distinguishes them from the common believers, but all that they are and all that they do are for the common believers, whom they serve and build up, and they are to us examples and patterns of how to live and serve God (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thes. 3:9). While we cannot bear the burden that they bear and carry out the ministry to the degree that they carry it out, we can and should live and serve in God's economy, each according to one's own measure, as they do, by incorporating the operations of the Triune God in our Christian life and service. This is not a theoretical possibility, which I put forth by extension from this examination of the apostles' testimony; it is, in fact, strongly indicated by the New Testament, and this we shall see in the articles to come in this series. In the past five articles, in which I have catalogued, from Acts to Jude, the incorporate actions of Christ, the Spirit, and the apostles, I have touched upon only about half of all the instances of incorporation to be found in these twenty-two New Testament books. The other half relate to the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God by the New Testament believers, and in the articles to come I hope to fully demonstrate that we common believers can and should live and serve God, not by our own will, concept, virtue, or power, but by God's constant operation in Christ as the Spirit in our spirit. This, I believe, should revolutionize our Christian and church life. **AFC**

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