

An Incomplete Examination and Application of Paul's Life and Teachings

Spirituality according to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ, by Rodney Reeves. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011.

Rodney Reeves, Professor of Biblical Studies at Southwest Baptist University and dean of its Courts Redford College of Theology and Ministry, has written a biblically grounded and insightful book entitled *Spirituality according to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ* (hereafter *Spirituality*). The book's preface reveals that Reeves wrote the book in order to demonstrate the expedience of Paul's life and teachings for modern-day Christian living. *Spirituality* presents a deeper understanding of Paul and what it means to imitate him than many contemporary works, but because the book's explication of Paul's pneumatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology is incomplete or inaccurate, the path of practice it delineates is lacking. Although *Spirituality* emphasizes Paul's pattern of being crucified, buried, and raised with Christ and specifies that we can imitate this pattern only by the power of the Spirit, the book fails to adequately describe the functions of the Spirit, the believers' relationship to Him, or the outcomes of that relationship.

Synopsis and Affirmations

At the start *Spirituality* alerts its readers to the common error of considering only Paul's doctrine while overlooking his lived experience, and the book remains calibrated to this principle. Accordingly, the book's approach, which is implied in its title, is to elucidate Paul as not only our teacher but also our pattern. The introduction argues that Paul's message was in fact his living and that just as he imitated Christ in spite of not knowing Him in the flesh, we too may imitate Paul notwithstanding the great span of time that now divides us. *Spirituality*'s introduction

further clarifies that a Christian's imitation of Paul is not merely external mimicry of a "moral example" but rather "depend[s] upon a relationship with God through Christ...empowered by the Spirit of Christ" (17).

The twelve chapters of *Spirituality* are divided equally into three parts, the titles of which indicate the book's interpretation of Paul's definitive experiences—the experiences that we are to imitate—"Crucified with Christ," "Buried with Christ," and "Raised with Christ." A key sentence in the introduction summarizes the book's

thesis: "Paul believed the gospel was a Spirit-filled life that empowered Christ believers to sacrifice themselves (death), to rely on each other (burial) and to live as heavenly people (resurrection)" (16). Although each chapter begins with an attention-grabbing personal or historical anecdote, the message of *Spirituality* is largely rooted in Scripture while simultaneously linked to the present

Christian experience. The book is also to be commended for unabashedly exposing several modern Western cultural assumptions that may hinder the fullest Christian experience per Paul's pattern.

Part One: Crucified with Christ

Chapter 1, "Foolish Death: *Suffering the Loss of All Things*," which is based primarily on Paul's Epistles to the Galatians and Philippians, emphasizes the shamefulness and humiliation of crucifixion and details Paul's forsaking of his past identity and boasts after his conversion. This chapter then highlights the lack of a similar loss, or even a willingness to experience it, among modern Christians. It identifies the counterintuitiveness to the modern American mind to boast in loss: "Most of us would rather hear about the benefits of the gospel, as if it were a product to satisfy consumers" (33).

Chapter 2, "Living Sacrifice: *Crucifying the World*," draws on the Epistles to the Corinthians. It suggests that just as Paul wrote to jar the Corinthians from the stupor induced

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by their cultural context, we too need a fresh hearing of the gospel to test our basic assumptions about our lives and the world we live in.

Chapter 2 continues the thought of the preceding chapter concerning our need to see loss as gain and weakness as strength. *Spirituality* portrays living a crucified life as willingly sacrificing oneself for others. Despite making statements that, if taken out of context, appear dangerously ascetic, *Spirituality* repeats the important stipulation that conformity to Christ's death can be attained only by the power of the Spirit: "'Fruit of the Spirit'...were not 'virtues' achieved by the self...These qualities were evident in the life of one who was empowered by the Spirit; that is, fruit must be produced in a believer by a divine source" (86).

Chapter 3, "Holy Temples: *Denying the Flesh*," which is still based mainly on the Corinthian Epistles, explores how Paul links idolatry—defined as "our attempt to capture the glory of God for ourselves"—and fornication (58). This chapter concludes, "When we sacrifice ourselves, we reveal the glory of God's presence just like Christ because we are his temple" (64).

Chapter 4, "Free Slaves: *Graceful Obedience*," examines Paul's negative perspective on the law and correctly identifies "works of the flesh" as "attempts at doing the right thing without the Spirit" (80). *Spirituality* surmises that Paul "was convinced the same power that enabled him to live a crucified life was the power who lived in every Christ believer...the Spirit's power" (82). Regarding the controversy between legalists and libertines, the book argues, "Neither extreme revealed the Spirit-led life...Paul presented himself as the exemplar of a Spirit-filled life. He learned how to sacrifice personal convictions for the welfare of the group" (84).

Part Two: Buried with Christ

Chapter 5, "Whole Body: *One Faith*," argues that Paul emphasized baptism because it implies communality—being buried, raised, and subsequently cared for requires us to depend on others, but this chapter also postulates that "'one faith, one baptism' sounded just as foreign to first-century believers as it does to us today" (95). *Spirituality* bemoans the divisiveness and competitiveness among present-day denominations and hopes for mutual recognition and acceptance in spite of "diversity" (106). The book also identifies the daily nature of the church life in Paul's vision and practice and laments that this sounds "cultic" to modern ears (109).

Chapter 6, "Common Bonds: *Worship as Corporate Reality*," continues with the ecclesiastical theme of the preceding chapter, asserting that we need to be with

other Christians in order to render adequate worship to God. It illustrates the "social" aspect of our worship with the unity of group hymn singing (111-112). In this chapter *Spirituality* highlights the irony of the Corinthians' divisiveness being especially evident at the Lord's table, where they were supposed to be reminded of their common need and means of salvation (124). After discussing at length the problem of division in the church, this chapter's positive recommendation is to remember the communal nature of memorializing Christ's sacrifice at His table. However, the only pattern it presents is an ad-hoc gathering in a nursing home, singing and receiving the bread and cup in unity.

Chapter 7, "Sacred Community: *Sex and Marriage*," argues that Paul's attitude toward marriage was predicated on his belief in Christ's imminent return. It identifies marriage and family as the typical priority of Western Christians and bravely questions whether these institutions should instead "serve the church in its mission," as Paul taught (133). The book suggests that by being devoted to Christ, a couple will know how to be a good husband and wife. Returning to the theme of communality, chapter 7 explains that Paul disciplined the whole church in Corinth for tolerating an incestuous relationship, because "sexual sin affects the entire church" (141). Here and elsewhere, *Spirituality* does much to elucidate the historical contexts of Paul's Epistles. In the context of explaining that the goal of "shunning" a sexually sinning member "was reclamation," *Spirituality* goes against the grain of the modern, individualistic notions of faith and church, concluding, "For Paul, spirituality was both personal and corporate. For him one couldn't be a Christian without church" (142).

Chapter 8, "Generous Fellowship: *Work and Money*," frames material giving as a continuation of grace, defined as all things given to us from God, and proclaims, "We become the grace of God as we share the grace of God. We become God's gift to one another" (158). This chapter complains, "We've also lost the first gift of the church: hospitality" (155). After describing the operation of a particular homeless shelter, *Spirituality* reasons, "Hospitality and sharing of resources and working for the entire community and praying together and worshipping together—for lack of a better word is church" (161).

Part Three: Raised with Christ

Chapter 9, "Bold Confession: *Wasting No Time*," explores different historical conceptions of time, especially Paul's view of eternal, spiritual realities that are present in time, which is in contrast to our more ossified notions of the past and the unremitting march of the present. Therefore, it continues, "Paul could think of

salvation as past, present, and future” (171), and, “The resurrection—the transforming power of Christ’s victory of death—is already at work in the life of every believer” (172). The discrepancy between our inward renewing and bodily decay means that “we simply have to wait for time to catch up with the reality of what God has already done through Christ *in us*” (175).

Further exploring time and resurrection, chapter 10, “Blessed Hope: *The Wait/Weight of Glory*,” discusses predestination and the historical emphasis on fate. According to *Spirituality*, Paul’s unconventional belief that “human destinies could change” (187) and his rejoicing in suffering occurred because he “tried to see these things from the vantage point of resurrection” (189). This chapter defines resurrection as unexpected recovery from inexplicable illness (193-195) and “the undeniable presence of God in the life of every believer” (196). Its theme is that death, decay, and suffering are the necessary prerequisites of resurrection glory.

Chapter 11, “Putting Up a Fight: *Opposing the Powers*,” contextualizes polytheistic Ephesus and explains that anxiety and fear are contradictory to reigning with Christ as His Body by His resurrection power over spiritual forces of evil. “Paul wanted his converts to see the world through resurrected eyes, that they wore the resurrected Christ like body armor” (209). Wearing the armor of God is portrayed by *Spirituality* as maintaining one’s faith in the midst of suffering and praying to defeat Satan and his forces. Whether prayer “works” is not a matter of outward improvements but of inward salvation (212). “Prayer is confidence, an act of defiance against evil and suffering,...remembering what God has done,...perseverance, an act of thanksgiving” (213).

Chapter 12, “Seeing Things: *Mystical Journeys*,” presents a case for the normalcy of personal revelation. When we hear the gospel, the Spirit allows us to see and understand God for the first time (218). Finding the instant speaking of God by interpreting Scripture, especially prophecies, is something that the Jews did and Paul did. *Spirituality* balances this recommendation by warning against placing oneself as the center of any exegetical exercise or ignoring historical context. It points out that although Paul experienced visions, miracles, and speaking in tongues, he did not emphasize them or suggest that others should

attempt to duplicate them (226-228). Nevertheless, it concludes by conjecturing, “Even though Paul didn’t intend it, I think many of us are imitating him when we experience [miraculous visions and divine speaking]” (233).

The conclusion of *Spirituality*, entitled “The Imitable Life,” cautions against speculation regarding Paul’s stance on current sociopolitical issues and says that if asked, Paul would tell us to imitate him by “imitating Christ in his death, burial and resurrection, walking in the power of his Holy Spirit,” specifically by sacrificing ourselves for others, seeing “that we need each other to be the body of Christ,” and standing “against *all* evil and suffering,” fearing nothing and remembering that “our fight is not against ‘flesh and blood’” (235). Rather than “giving us detailed instructions for every scenario...Paul would tell us to count on the Spirit, who would guide us in all these things” (235).

Deficiencies

The Life-giving Spirit and the Divine Life

Although *Spirituality* is more homiletic than systematic, it behooves the reader to question certain recurring theological assumptions and gaps. In spite of the book’s commendable

emphasis on being empowered by the Spirit (commendable because it precludes unsustainable and counterproductive attempts to mimic Paul’s pattern by the self—akin to law-keeping), it neglects to adequately describe the Spirit or its function in the life and teaching of Paul and in the life of the believers today. The book’s introduction defines “the Holy Spirit/the Spirit of Christ” as a “power” to which we yield (16). The sole function of the Spirit presented throughout *Spirituality* is that of giving power (e.g., 17, 75, 79, 83, 211, 224). In fact, in Paul’s writings, as in the rest of the New Testament, the Spirit gives not only power but also life—the eternal, divine life (*zoe*)—and actually is life to the believers (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:6; John 6:63; Col. 3:4).

Spirituality sets out to examine only Paul’s life and writings, but it does not shy away from referencing other portions of Scripture: “When it comes to the Bible, the ending explains the beginning...The Bible starts with a garden and ends with a garden city” (169-170). The outstanding features of these two garden scenes at the beginning and the end of the Bible are the tree of life and a river—the

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river of water of life—indicating God’s foremost intention to impart Himself as life into man (Gen. 2:9-10; Rev. 22:1-2; cf. v. 17). Christ proclaimed that the purpose of the process begun by His incarnation was not that we would have power but that we would have life (John 10:10). Twice He announced that He was the life—not the power (11:25; 14:6; cf. 4:10; 6:35; 7:38-39). Paul echoes this unambiguous characterization of Christ as life (Col. 3:4). John identifies Christ as the One in whom was life (John 1:4) and equates having Him to having life (1 John 5:12). Nevertheless, *Spirituality* fails to mention the divine, eternal, uncreated life of God aside from once quoting Ephesians 4:18, where Paul speaks of being alienated from the life of God (209).

Despite citing portions of Romans 1—7 at least forty-eight times, *Spirituality* neglects to acknowledge even one of the many instances in these chapters in which life is revealed as a significant aspect of the Christian experience (1:17; 2:7; 5:10, 17-18, 21; 6:4, 22-23). Likewise, *Spirituality* cites Romans 8 at least twenty-six times but does not once speak of the Spirit of life, which appears prominently in verse 2, nor does the book give a hint of the significance of life in the normal Christian experience presented in Romans 8 (vv. 2, 6, 10-11). Footnote 2 on verse 2 in the Recovery Version observes,

In this chapter life is joined with the Spirit in the phrase *the Spirit of life*, showing that everything regarding life in the preceding chapters is included in the Spirit in this chapter. Life belongs to the Spirit, and the Spirit is of life. These two are actually one (John 6:63). The way to experience the divine, eternal, uncreated life is by the Spirit of life.

The Lord spoke of receiving the divine life by being born of the Spirit in John 3:3 and 6. Acts 11:18 speaks of repentance being unto life. Receiving the divine life through believing is what makes us children of God (John 1:12; 3:15-16). Paul’s Epistles are saturated with the notion of our growth and maturity in the divine life as children, sons, and heirs of God (Rom. 8:14, 16-17, 29; 1 Cor. 3:1; 14:20; Gal. 3:26; 4:6-7; Col. 1:28; 2:19; 4:12; Eph. 4:15-16). Regrettably, *Spirituality* speaks only of our being sons of God by adoption (176), implying a strictly legal relationship with God as our Father, who in fact has begotten us with His life, causing us to be partakers of the divine nature (John 1:13; 2 Pet. 1:4). *Spirituality* laments that it sounds “cultic” to modern ears for Christians to refer to one another as “brothers and sisters” (109) but misses the point that as genuine children of the same Father—fellow recipients of the divine life—we actually are brothers and sisters.

Ironically, by overlooking the importance of the divine life in the normal experience of the believers, *Spirituality*

omits the crucial medium through which they receive the divine power that the book highlights as the necessary source to replicate the “imitable” life. Just as the power, or ability, to produce peaches is in the peach life—the life of a peach tree—a particular life can be said to inherently contain and transmit a certain power. Since divine power is obtained by and issues from the divine life, possessing this life is a necessary prerequisite to receiving the power. Hence, the absence of any mention of the divine life or the life-giving aspect of the Spirit in *Spirituality* is an egregious misrepresentation of the Spirit and the normal experience of a believer in Christ.

The All-inclusive Spirit

Spirituality neglects not only the life-giving aspect of the Spirit but also its all-inclusiveness, which is based on Christ’s experiences and attainments being compounded into the Spirit. According to *Spirituality*, it was Paul’s “flexible” conception of time that allowed him to participate in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection (179). It is true that in God’s eyes the believers were present in Christ as He passed through these processes, but the efficacy of those accomplishments is applied to the believers’ inner being by the Spirit. Andrew Murray writes that just as the Son

entered upon a new stage of existence when He became flesh...so the Spirit of God as poured out at Pentecost was indeed something new...He came as the Spirit of the glorified Jesus, the Spirit of the Incarnate, crucified, and exalted Christ, the bearer and communicator to us [of the life of God] as it had been interwoven into human nature. (38)

The elements of Christ’s humanity, divinity, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension have been compounded into the Spirit, which now applies all that Christ accomplished, obtained, and attained to the believers as they partake of Him.

Spirituality speaks of Paul’s Gentile converts receiving “the promises God made to Abraham” (75) but does not specify that the all-inclusive promised blessing of God’s full gospel is the Spirit (Gal. 3:14), who supplies to the believers all the riches of the Triune God (2 Cor. 13:14), including Christ’s accomplishments. *Spirituality* presents the experience of the cross mainly as a principle of self-sacrifice, but it is more important to see that the death of Christ is automatically applied to the negative elements in us, especially our natural soul-life, by the compound Spirit, whom we drink of and enjoy (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 12:13). Similarly, resurrection is not merely a principle of renewal, as *Spirituality* suggests (175), but the transmission of the One who is the resurrection and the life into all our inward parts (John 11:25).

In this way, the power of resurrection conforms us to Christ's death (Phil. 3:10).

The Human Spirit

In addition to omitting the aforementioned crucial aspects of the Spirit, *Spirituality* also completely misses the human spirit. The book's few ambiguous mentions of the lowercase *spirit* (44, 141, 175, 225, 230) are not deemed worthy of an entry in the book's rather comprehensive index, leading the reader to surmise that its author either does not believe in the existence of the human spirit as a distinct organ and faculty within man or does not understand its importance (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; Zech. 12:1). To diminish the significance of the human spirit as a distinct part of tripartite man, along with the body and the soul, is dangerous for our Christian experience. For instance, true worship by spiritual contact and fellowship with God can only be in our spirit (John 4:23-24). Furthermore, it is in our spirit that we are born of the Spirit with the divine life to become genuine children of God (3:6), and it is with our spirit that the Spirit witnesses that we are children of God regenerated by Him (Rom. 8:16).

The omission of the human spirit from *Spirituality* is particularly inexcusable given its basis in Paul's writings. According to Paul, without our spirit we cannot know "the things of man" (1 Cor. 2:11), nor can we receive "wisdom and revelation" from God (Eph. 1:17). In contrast, *Spirituality* emphasizes the use of the mind in understanding and realizing spiritual things (232). Every chapter of Ephesians mentions the human spirit (1:17; 2:22; 3:5; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18). Second Timothy 4:22 says, "The Lord be with your spirit." Paul ends several of his Epistles with similar blessings connecting Christ and our spirit (Gal. 6:18; Philem. 25; Phil. 4:23).

Spirituality acknowledges the inward, subjective experience of Christ when it says, "Paul was convinced he was experiencing the resurrection of Christ on the inside. A renewed mind. An encouraged heart. A satisfied soul. An undefeatable Spirit" (173). However, by implicitly denying the regenerated human spirit, the book obscures the organ of faith in which all true spiritual experiences begin. A believer should relate to the Spirit not only by submitting to and following Him, as suggested by

Spirituality, but also by actively contacting, receiving, and enjoying Him through the exercise of his human spirit (John 4:24; 1 Tim. 4:7).

The Organic Union in the Mingled Spirit and Transformation

Spirituality briefly acknowledges the importance of the New Testament phrases *in Christ* and *Christ in you* as indicating the believers' union with Christ (17) but does little to delve into the nature or function of this union. This is not surprising, given the fact that the book implicitly denies the significance of the divine life and the human spirit, for it is in our spirit that we are organically united with the Triune God in Christ (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22). The Lord portrays our life union with Him as the relationship of the branches with the vine in John 15. In 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul identifies the inward location

of this union: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." The Lord as the Spirit is mingled with our spirit to form one mingled spirit, in which we are organically united with Him. *Spirituality* dismissively dubs key Pauline passages concerning a living in the mingled spirit as "vague expressions" (83).

Spirituality also makes much of baptism as burial but completely overlooks its significance as organically uniting the believers with Christ. Acts 8:16, however, highlights this significance by speaking of being "baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." "To be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus is to be baptized into the person of the Lord, to be identified with the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, to be put into an organic union with the living Lord" (Recovery Version, note 2).

Although Part One of *Spirituality* makes much of Paul's pattern of being weak, it misses that it is only in our organic union with Christ that we may reproduce this pattern (2 Cor. 13:4). Romans 6:5 speaks of our participation in Christ's death and resurrection. "In the organic union with Christ, whatever Christ passed through has become our history. His death and resurrection are now ours because we are in Him and are organically joined to Him" (Recovery Version, note 1).

The premise of *Spirituality*—that Paul's pattern can be followed by Christians today—is undermined by its

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failure to see the organic union in the mingled spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul's pattern (his "ways") were "in Christ," that is, in the organic union with Christ. Instead, *Spirituality* implies that Paul's relationship with Christ was based primarily on an objective, historical knowledge: "The only reason Paul can see the advantage of his imprisonment...is due to the example of Christ" (35). Apart from the organic union with Christ in our mingled spirit, following the pattern of Paul and Christ then becomes only "a matter of making up your mind" (83).

Due to *Spirituality's* inaccurate view of regeneration with God's life, the parts of man, and our organic union with Christ, it assumes that the object of transformation is merely the way we live (16, 172, 225). According to Paul, the actual object of transformation is our inward constitution and person (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The absence in *Spirituality* of any notion of the believers' organic union with Christ or transformation is an inevitable consequence of its incomplete view of the Spirit and its diminishing of the human spirit, for the organic union is in the mingling of the two spirits, and transformation is the work of the Spirit from within our spirit to impart the divine life into our soul.

Another Imitable New Testament Pattern: the Oneness of the Church

The goal of transformation is not merely individual perfection but being made suitable for God's building, the church (1 Cor. 3:9-10, 12). *Spirituality* affirms the oneness of the universal church but does not question the present paradigm of denominationalism in its vision of the church's practical expression. As a result, it hopes only for mutual recognition and acceptance within the current degraded system of division. The book presumes that various meetings in a New Testament locality were administratively independent house churches within the city. For instance, *Spirituality* speaks of "the house churches" in Corinth (140), while ignoring the fact that Paul addresses his first Epistle to the Corinthians to the singular "church of God which is in Corinth" (1:2; cf. Acts 8:1; Rev. 1:11).

The claim in *Spirituality* that the churches in Rome and Corinth were segregated by race and social status is supported only by a brief and problematic interpretation of Romans 16:3-11 (120). For instance, *Spirituality* assumes that certain groups, such as the slaves of a particular household, met together according to personal preference rather than what circumstances permitted. The conflicts among various groups in the early churches demonstrate that they were meeting together as one church in each locality, and Paul explicitly addressed these problems in order to preserve the principle of the church's oneness

universally and locally. The book admits only that Paul discouraged division.

When *Spirituality* interprets the oneness of the church represented by the Lord's table as merely a shared need and means of salvation rather than the actual oneness of the Body of Christ (124, 126), the book obscures even the oneness of the universal church. Elsewhere, *Spirituality* says, "One church, one faith, one baptism—sounds idealistic today," lamenting the apparent impossibility of being "united" (94-95). Actually, the Body of Christ is not merely united—joined together—but is in fact inseparably one (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:4).

Spirituality condones denominationalism when it says,

God has so arranged the body of Christ—Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, evangelicals, Catholics, Anglicans—for the common good of every single one of us... Differences should reveal how much we need each other. (108)

Although the book bemoans the competitiveness among these divisions and recommends mutual tolerance, it misses that the denominational structure itself is the problem. Christians in different denominations do not merely need to realize that they need one another and occasionally come together—they need to forsake the entire system of denominations and come to the God-ordained ground of oneness.

Conclusion

Spirituality identifies being crucified, buried, and raised with Christ as crucial aspects of Paul's pattern, and in so doing, comes closer than much of contemporary Christian literature in describing the way the Christian life should look. However, the book falls short of delineating the way such a life can be attained. We should imitate Paul by similarly experiencing Christ subjectively in our organic union with Him so that we may gain Him and that He may formed in us (Phil. 3:8; Gal. 4:19). The spirituality that Paul lived and taught was nothing other than Christ Himself as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, to whom Paul was organically united in his spirit and whose Body he sought to build in oneness.

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A One-sided Union with Christ

Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church, by J. Todd Billings. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

J. Todd Billings, associate professor of theology at Western Theological Seminary explores in *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (hereafter *Union*) the truth concerning the believers' union with Christ and its implications for the Christian life and ministry. Drawing from the traditions of authors such as Calvin and Bavinck, *Union* attempts to outline a proper understanding of salvation as union with Christ in order to adjust the deistic and self-centered theology of the West, in which God is far away and the self is the center of salvation; bring together themes of communion with God and a life of love and justice toward the neighbor in the understanding of the gospel; and provide an alternative to the notion of incarnational ministry. Although *Union* displays an understanding of the problems it seeks to address and proposes a noteworthy solution to these problems, *Union's* answer ultimately falls short because it misses key elements that define union with Christ and emphasizes only half of the truth concerning union with Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

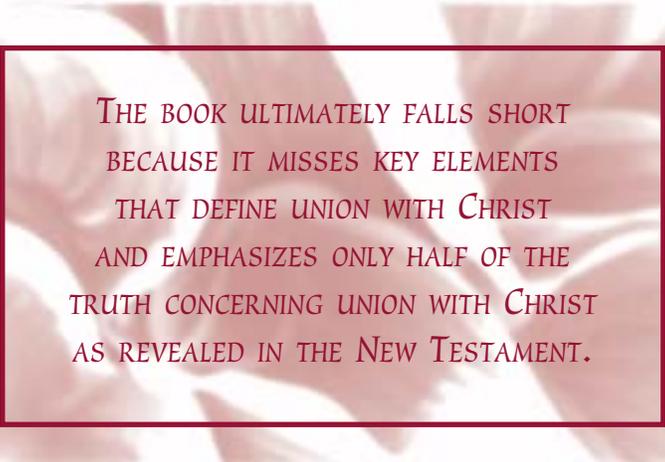
A Partial Understanding of the Truth concerning Union with Christ

In its introduction *Union* defines union with Christ as a central description of the life of salvation in Christ, which "entails the giving of a new identity such that in Christ, forgiveness and new life are received through the Spirit" (1). It places salvation as adoption at the heart of a theology of union with Christ and in its first chapter attempts to contrast the image of salvation as adoption with "moralistic therapeutic deism," a phrase that it believes to characterize the "cultural theology" of most American teenagers (22).

Union explains that "the God of the Bible has no 'natural'

or 'begotten' children apart from Jesus the Son; all the rest of us need to be adopted" (16). It suggests that for Paul, adoption is the act of being transferred from an alien family into the family of God so that we are given a new identity, which we need to "live into" (19). For *Union*, salvation as adoption includes not only the legal act of being transferred into God's family (justification) but also the transformative process (sanctification) of growing in God's family (20). In other words,

while the metaphor of adoption begins as a legal act, it does not end there: it ends with membership in the household of God (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19), with a calling to act in the reality of this new identity. God's legal act of adopting into the family of God results in a new identity, in an eschatologically conditioned way. Thus, when we are given an identity in Christ, we are called to live into it. (19)



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In the second chapter *Union* draws from Augustine, Calvin, and Luther in order to show that total depravity in sin, the inability of humans to perform any good related to salvation apart from the Spirit, and total communion in Christ are two sides of the truth of union with Christ. Central to this argument, *Union* claims

that "to be fully human is to be united to God" (44). This claim supposes that Adam prior to the fall was righteous because to a limited extent, he was "united" with God by virtue of his being created in the image of God (44). The book states that sin, which came in through the fall, separated man from God and caused man to seek his identity in himself instead of in God, and it suggests that salvation as union with Christ is a restoration and uplifting of the created man who seeks his identity in Christ.

In the third chapter *Union* shows from the writings of Calvin and Bavinck how the mystery of God and communion with God are one inseparable thought (90). While pointing out what it regards as extremes—an improper use of language related to union with Christ that sets aside God's transcendence and a functional deism that occupies much of Western Christianity—*Union* argues that "divine transcendence and immanence do not point in opposite directions" (69). It argues that God, out of love, accommodates at a human level in order to reveal Himself to man, since God's knowledge of Himself is greater than man's knowledge of Him. It

concludes, “While Christians can look forward to ‘face-to-face’ fellowship with God, that knowledgeable fellowship will be just as dependent upon God’s condescending love made known in Christ as fellowship with God is now” (94).

In the fourth chapter *Union* attempts to show how salvation as union with Christ enables us to see the relationship between the gospel, communion with God, and living a life of justice and love. It argues for a relationship that avoids, on the one hand, the reduction of the gospel to a life of doing good such that the person who does good becomes the center rather than the Triune God and, on the other hand, a gospel that relegates a life of justice to an auxiliary position. *Union* suggests that salvation as union with Christ consists not only of the forgiveness of sins but also of a new life, which is manifested as a life of justice to bear fruit by the Spirit; thus, the gospel and a life of justice cannot be separated. It concludes,

When the gospel of union with Christ is attended to as both forgiveness of sins and renewal in a life of love of God and neighbor...,renewed activity for a life of justice will be a by-product, by the Spirit’s power. For in the covenantal, trinitarian, and Christ-centered state of being in union with Christ, we discover how to commune with our brothers and sisters in Christ *and* our neighbor in need. (118)

In the final chapter *Union* offers a critique of the so-called “incarnation ministry,” a model for missionary work in Christian circles that takes as its center the imitation of the unique act of Christ’s incarnation, and offers a replacement for the model. *Union* points out that the work of Christ in His being incarnated to be a man is unique to God and should not be mimicked. It suggests that even though the incarnation-ministry model has some positive aspects in relation to “cross-cultural ministry,” those positive aspects find their doctrinal basis in portions of the Scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, rather than in the unique act of the eternal Word becoming flesh.

The New Testament Denotation of Union: an Organic Union Illustrated by the Grafted Life

Even though *Union* defines union with Christ as including forgiveness and a new life, its use of *new life* refers mainly to a new living by virtue of being in Christ and almost never to the divine life itself. Such a definition falls short of the biblical concept of union, because it is one-sided. *Union* mainly emphasizes the fact that the believers have been placed in Christ and that they abide in Christ, whereas the New Testament union not only means that the believers are in Christ but also that Christ is in the believers. Actually, the New Testament union is

an organic union in which two lives are joined together as one (6:17; John 15:4-5). This is illustrated by grafting in Romans 11:17, which says, “You, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them and became a fellow partaker of the root of fatness of the olive tree.” In the process of grafting, two similar lives are joined together as one so that they share one mingled life and one living. When we believe into Christ, an organic union transpires such that we are not only joined to and placed or transferred into Christ, but we also receive Christ as the eternal life into us (Gal. 2:16; John 3:16; 1 John 5:11-12). *Union*’s one-sided understanding of the believers’ union with Christ is a basic factor that undermines the argument of the entire work.

Salvation as Sonship

The implications of *Union*’s partial understanding of union with Christ become evident in its explanation of adoption¹ into God’s family. First, *Union*’s suggestion that Christ is the only natural Son begotten by God (16) has no scriptural basis. This claim exposes a lack in *Union*’s realization of Christ not only as the only begotten Son of God but also as the firstborn Son of God with many brothers (John 3:16; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6). John 1 clearly reveals that those who are children of God by believing into Christ’s name are begotten of God, possessing the divine life (vv. 12-13; cf. 3:6). On the one hand, the believers cannot and do not participate in Christ’s sonship as the only begotten Son given by God (1:14; 3:16); but, on the other hand, through God’s complete salvation the believers become exactly the same as Christ the designated firstborn Son of God, possessing His life and nature (Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 2:9-11).

Second, even though *Union* attempts to distinguish between a traditional understanding of *adoption* and a higher biblical reality of the word, it ultimately fails to convey that the believers are children of God not only by a change of position, out of Adam into Christ, but primarily by the impartation of the divine life. *Union* speaks of a transformative aspect of salvation as adoption and strongly associates this aspect with a new identity received by virtue of union with Christ; however, it gives no indication of this identity belonging to the divine life. In other words, while *Union*’s view of sanctification is a matter of “living into” a new adopted identity by the power of the Spirit, the New Testament reality of sanctification is a matter of the divine life growing within the believers in order to transform and conform them to the image or form of that life, Christ (Rom. 8:10, 6, 11, 29; 2 Cor. 3:18). In simple terms, we are children of God, not merely because we have changed positions but because we have the life of God, which we received into our human spirit by regeneration.

**The Mingled Spirit—
the Divine Spirit with the Human Spirit—
Being the Center of the Believers’ Organic Union
with Christ and the Initiation of Their Sonship**

Regarding the believers’ union with Christ and their sonship, *Union* misses at least two crucial items: the human spirit and its relationship with the divine Spirit. In *Union* there is no discussion of the regenerated human spirit and its role in the believers’ union with Christ or sonship. Actually, the human spirit is mentioned only once in the entire work, and only in a quotation of Romans 8:16 related to another matter (31). The importance of the human spirit in the believers’ relationship with Christ cannot be overstated, since it is in the regenerated human spirit that the union of the Triune God and man takes place. This fact is revealed in 1 Corinthians 6:17, which says, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”

Furthermore, it is when the human spirit is mingled with the divine Spirit through regeneration that the process of the believers’ sonship is initiated. For this reason, Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.” Through regeneration God in Christ as the Spirit has been imparted into and mingled with the believers’ spirit as life (John 14:10; Col. 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:45; Rom. 8:10). This mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit is the center of the believers’ organic union with the Triune God and the initiation of their sonship.

God’s Purpose in Creating Man

Although *Union* argues that the fallen man is incapable of saving himself, it subscribes to a notion that Adam possessed and that even the fallen man possesses to some extent a relationship of union with God. This exposes a deficiency in *Union*’s comprehension of the purpose of God in His creation of man and in salvation, and of man’s condition as a result of the fall. In suggesting that Adam was united with God before the fall, *Union* effectively nullifies God’s purpose for man, and in suggesting that fallen man still has some kind of union with God, it nullifies God’s salvation as presented in the gospel.

According to the revelation of the Bible, God created a corporate man with the intention that this man would

take Him in as life and thus become one with Him. For this reason, God intended that the man He created would partake of the tree of life, signifying God Himself as food to man (Gen. 2:7-9, 16-17; John 14:6; 15:1). By partaking of God’s life and nature, the created man could be joined to God. This joining, union, according to the Bible, is intrinsically related to life and enables God to accomplish His purpose of gaining a counterpart for Christ, a bride who matches Him in life, nature, appearance, and function.

The issue of sin in Genesis 3 brought man into a position where it was impossible for him to receive God as life apart from Christ’s redemption (vv. 22-24). The gift of salvation is not that salvation restores us to where Adam was but that it accomplishes God’s purpose of imparting Himself into us so that we can become children of God, possessing the life of God, and members of the Body of Christ, His counterpart.

Conclusion

While *Union*’s application of union with Christ is far-reaching, its understanding of this truth differs from the New Testament revelation concerning the believers’ relationship with Christ. On the one hand, *Union* is too inclusive when it suggests

that Adam prior to the fall was united with God; on the other hand, it is too narrow when it emphasizes only that the believers are transferred into Christ and neglects that Christ is in the believers.

Finally, *Union* misses the intrinsic relationship between not only the divine life and union with Christ but also the divine Spirit, the human spirit, sonship, and union with Christ. These problems ultimately diminish the value of *Union*’s response to the issues that it seeks to address and to its application of union with Christ in the Christian life and ministry.

by Joel Oladele

Notes

¹The Greek word translated “adoption” by *Union* literally means “setting someone as a son” and implies a process of becoming a son. Although this Greek word may be translated “adoption,” a better word, which still does not give the full sense of the Greek word, is *sonship*.

IN THE BOOK THERE IS NO DISCUSSION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT. HOWEVER, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT IN THE BELIEVERS’ RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST CANNOT BE OVERSTATED, SINCE IT IS IN THE REGENERATED HUMAN SPIRIT THAT THE UNION OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND MAN TAKES PLACE.

A Miraculous Pneumatology

Seven Spirits Burning: The Christocentric Operation of the Seven Spirits of God, by John Crowder. Santa Cruz: Sons of Thunder Ministries & Publications, 2010.

In *Seven Spirits Burning: The Christocentric Operation of the Seven Spirits of God* (hereafter *Seven*), John Crowder claims that “the Lord is now restoring a *Christocentric pneumatology* to the church” (11). *Seven* warns against an improper understanding of the Spirit’s operation that is separated from the person and work of Christ and intends to present a “Christ-centered theology of Holy Spirit” (11). Unfortunately, the book fails to fulfill this commendable aspiration and is ultimately more focused on miracles than it is on Christ.

Crowder, founder of Sons of Thunder Ministries & Publications and The Santa Cruz Church, is a self-proclaimed “new mystic” with influence from the Latter Rain movement through the writings of Rick Joyner. He traces his supernatural genealogy through the epochs of church history and encourages the believers to join the ranks of a new generation of miracle-wielding apostolic believers who will bring in the kingdom of God through simultaneous spiritual life and economic/political influence in the world.

The Seven Spirits and the Seven Lampstands

Chapters 1 through 3 are primarily an interpretation of the seven Spirits and the seven lampstands, using the book of Revelation, Exodus 25, and Zechariah 4. Crowder feels that “it is important to lay some strong Biblical foundations,” because he contends that there has been “little revelatory teaching” on the seven Spirits (25).¹

Seven avoids the error of interpreting the seven Spirits as anything other than the Spirit of God and rejects a literal reading that would imply seven individual Spirits. In the same way that the lampstand is one solid work of gold with seven branches, the “Holy Spirit is one, yet He is also *sevenfold*” (23). *Seven* interprets this description of the Spirit as implying seven elements, dynamics, characteristics, operations, or flows of the same Spirit (24).

Seven continues by identifying the seven lampstands as key to understanding the operation of the seven Spirits. *Seven* recognizes that the lampstands speak of the identity of the believers (37), because the book of Revelation

tells us that “the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (1:20). In order to understand the relationship between the seven Spirits and the seven lampstands, *Seven* turns to the vision of the lampstand in Exodus 25 and Zechariah 4.

In its exposition of Exodus 25 *Seven* interprets the golden nature of the lampstand as typifying “[God’s] own deity” (43). It interprets the form of the lampstand as typifying the vine tree of the Son in John 15, the almond blossoms, cups, and calyxes indicating that the lampstand is “a living tree of life” (45). It interprets the central stock of the lampstand as the Lord Himself, and the six branches as the believers, who are branches abiding in the vine. *Seven* sees the Spirit not only in the seven lamps upon the lampstand but as “the sap or nutrient that flows through us to bear fruit” (43). The seven Spirits represent “a complete, perfect and total abundance of God in the substance of His Spirit in the life of the church” (30).

Seven strengthens this image of the Spirit as the flow of God within the believers by turning to the vision of the lampstand in Zechariah 4. The book notes that, whereas the lamps are merely upon the lampstand in Exodus 25, golden oil flows through the seven pipes of the lampstand in Zechariah 4 (49) and that the Spirit “is the constant supply of abundant oil pouring from within [the believer’s] inner man” (51). *Seven* then identifies the relationship between the lampstand and the lamps in Exodus 25 with the old covenant and that in Zechariah 4 with the new covenant. The Spirit merely came upon man in the old covenant; He indwells the believers in the new covenant (58).

The Seven Spirits and Isaiah 11

Chapters 4 through 6 are short studies on the three pairings of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2, which *Seven* assumes is the hermeneutic key to understanding the seven Spirits in the book of Revelation. Isaiah 11:2 describes the Spirit that anointed the Lord as “The Spirit of Jehovah... / The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, / The Spirit of counsel and might, / The Spirit of the knowledge and fear of Jehovah.” In general, Crowder presents these attributes as enabling the believer to live a supernatural Christian life. The experience of the Spirit of wisdom and understanding is exemplified in a life filled with “visions, Heavenly translations and exotic angelic encounters” (139). The Spirit of counsel and might is “the ticket for walking in miracles, signs and wonders on a regular basis” (191). The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord are “completely interdependent upon one another in Kingdom operations” (223), which include influence over the powers of darkness and over earthly political authorities.

The Two Sons of Oil

The final chapter of *Seven* is an interpretation of the two sons of oil in Zechariah 4:14. According to *Seven*, the holy anointing oil symbolizes “both earthly authority and heavenly authority” (267). *Seven* links the two sons of oil with the two witnesses in Revelation 11. While Crowder notes that the two witnesses bear a strong resemblance to Moses and Elijah, he suggests a less “primitive” and “literalistic” understanding (258, 262). He interprets the two witnesses as representing “a two-fold *anointing* that will cover the entire church” (258), implying that the acts of power described in Revelation 11 will be manifest in an entire generation: “There have been untold predictions of a coming generation who would operate in the full manifestation of their sonship” (255). Crowder interprets this sonship as a dual influence in the earthly and heavenly spheres—he envisions a generation of believers like Abraham and Solomon, who were both rich and spiritual.

There are believers who will emerge in these days who possess billions and can raise the dead...When the spiritual and natural orders are in cohesion, it is fertile ground for the miraculous, freedom from poverty, righteous living, healthy homes and happy holiness. (279)

“We will see a mantle of authority on them that shakes nations, bends the knees of rulers and ushers the Glory of God into entire regions” (167).

Affirmation—Call for a Christocentric Pneumatology

There are positive elements in *Seven*. For example, Crowder offers a welcome critique of several elements within the charismatic movement and highlights the need for a Christocentric pneumatology. He says that “our misunderstanding of the Spirit’s functions and interaction is usually because we try to separate Him from the person of Christ” (63). Crowder recognizes that the Spirit’s operation is closely connected to Christ’s work on the cross, saying, “Calvary is both the foundation and the capstone to the Spirit-filled life” (66), although he fails to highlight the importance of the resurrection.² He thus contends that Pentecostal/charismatic activity is not a means to the baptism of the Spirit nor proof of it (77, 83) and that, rather, the baptism of the Spirit is “an experi-

ential manifestation of something we already have in Christ” (71).

With regard to the gifts, Crowder appreciates their reintroduction into the church but does not agree with placing undue focus on them (224-225). He stresses that, rather than being gift-centered, we should be God-centered: “The sevenfold [Spirit] is not merely a gift. *It is God Himself*” (181). He contrasts the word of knowledge in 1 Corinthians 12:8 (which he interprets as a miraculous gift) with the Spirit of knowledge in Isaiah 11:2 and reminds his reader that “the words are gifts; the Spirit is a person” (137). He realizes that true wisdom is the revelation of God (138), that real understanding is the ability to “*see the Lord* in a situation” (179), that counsel implies friendship with God (199), that might is the indwelling resurrection power of God (211), that knowledge is intimate personal knowledge of God (231), and that fear is a delightful enjoyment of God (238).

Crowder sees the Spirit as the flow of God within the believers, which far surpasses the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 (181). He sees that the believers are a new breed, infused with the divine essence and possessing “the DNA of God’s spiritual seed” (49). He realizes that the believers should not merely

seek the instant filling of the Spirit; rather, as living branches abiding in the vine, we “have rivers flowing out of [our] innermost being” (52).

Critique—Focus on a Miraculous Pneumatology

While *Seven*’s emphasis on a Christocentric pneumatology is welcomed, the majority of the book bears a very different flavor. Crowder understands that the Spirit’s operation is closely linked to the person and work of Christ, yet his portrayal of the “Spirit-filled life” is that of a primarily miraculous one. Crowder speaks of visionary experiences, participation in heavenly councils, and accounts of extreme healing (114, 196-198, 192). While miraculous gifts have their place in the New Testament, a proper understanding of the different kinds of gifts and their place in the move of God is essential to a properly balanced spiritual pursuit.

Paul speaks of three kinds of gifts: the gifted persons in Ephesians 4, the gifts in life in Romans 12, and the miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. The gifted persons

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are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11). The gifts in life include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and showing mercy (Rom. 12:4-8). The miraculous gifts include faith, healing, works of power, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:9-10).

Paul also tells us that not all gifts are equal in value; some gifts are greater than others (v. 31). Paul's words to the Corinthians indicate that, in principle, the order of the gifts is related to their profitability for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ. In general, Paul considered the gifted persons the top gifts and the gifts in life as greater than the miraculous gifts (v. 31; 14:1-6). The gifted persons are given by Christ the ascended Head for the perfecting of the saints unto the building up of the Body of Christ. The gifts in life are produced by the believers' experience of the grace of Christ for the edification of the believers and the building up of the church. In principle, the miraculous gifts have little profit in the building up of the church, as indicated by Paul's valuation of speaking in tongues (v. 6).

Paul spoke in tongues, yet he would not do so in the church (vv. 18-19). He instructs that speaking in tongues, if permitted, be limited to two or three and that it be accompanied by interpretation (vv. 27-28). Paul says that tongues are "for a sign, not to those who believe but to the unbelievers" (v. 22). If an unbeliever were to enter a Christian meeting and find the believers speaking in tongues, he would think that they were insane (v. 23). Here we see the basic principle that the miraculous gifts function, not primarily in the church but in the gospel as a testimony to the unbelievers for the spread of the church as the kingdom of God.

The New Testament includes a similar record with regard to the other miraculous gifts. The disciples followed the Lord to heal the sick, yet this healing was always connected to the spread of the gospel (Acts 3-4; 5:14-16; 8:5-7; 9:34-35; 14:6-11; 28:7-10). There is little indication that healing was practiced in the church.³ Paul, while willing to heal the unbelievers for the sake of the gospel, was unwilling to heal the believers for the sake of the work: Timothy was charged to take a little wine for his stomach, Epaphroditus became sick near to death, and Trophimus was left in Miletus sick (1 Tim. 5:23; Phil. 2:25-27; 2 Tim. 4:20). Similarly, Paul had supernatural visions and revelations, yet he was not willing to speak of them, except when compelled to do so for the sake of the gospel or in defense of his ministry against the "super-apostles" (Acts 27:23; 2 Cor. 12:1-11).

The fact that Paul mentions the miraculous gifts only in 1 Corinthians and was forced to defend the signs of his

apostleship in 2 Corinthians may indicate that the Corinthians' seeking of miraculous gifts was not to their glory but to their shame, being one of the many problems addressed by the apostle in his two Epistles to them. The miraculous gifts, while useful as a testimony to those outside, need not play a leading role in the church. Rather than seeking a miracle-filled life, we should seek after the "greater gifts," which are manifested through the growth and maturity in the divine life and perfected by the gifted members in the Body of Christ. Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 4 that every believer is a gift with a function and a measure of grace for the building up of the Body of Christ in love (vv. 7-16). As we mature in the divine life, we should put off the childish gifts and exercise our God-given function in the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 13:11).

The Pattern of a Normal Christian Life

Seven rightly notes that unusual manifestations of the Spirit are not required of the believers; nonetheless, it presents these manifestations as normal for the believers. *Seven* acknowledges that the operation of the Spirit in the New Testament is superior to that in the Old Testament, yet its sketch of the Christian life relies primarily upon Old Testament figures: it speaks of the wisdom of Solomon, the power of Samson and of David's mighty men, and the counsel that Abraham, Moses, and Job provided to God. In addition, *Seven* cites several "miracle workers" from church history and claims that "there has never been a period in the history of the church where the [miraculous] gifts were not present" (84). Crowder gives several accounts of miraculous manifestations in the life of "modern miracle workers," including Rick Joyner, Bill Johnson, and John Sanford. In addition, he recounts several instances of miraculous events in his own ministry and in the lives of those under his care.

Paul indicates that the Old Testament was written for our admonition (10:11), and there is much to learn concerning Christian life and service from careful study of the lives of the patriarchs. Yet it would be dangerous to ignore the New Testament change in God's operation and portray the Christian life as a mere intensification of Old Testament principles. The New Testament states clearly that the believers are greater than any who lived in the Old Testament (Matt. 11:11). While *Seven* interprets this to mean that the New Testament believers should manifest a life even more miraculous than those of Moses and Elijah, it is the apostle Paul whom the New Testament presents as "a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:16).

As outlined above, the apostle Paul possessed several miraculous gifts, yet their manifestation was primarily a sign of his apostleship and played a decreasing role in his life and ministry as the churches were established and in

need of building up. While Paul's gospel may have been accompanied by works of power, his Epistles portray a primarily inward operation of the Spirit that is essential for the believer's growth in Christ and for the building up of the church. The Spirit regenerates the believers with the divine life, He renews them as the new creation, He sanctifies them in the divine nature, He transforms them into the divine image, and ultimately He glorifies them with the divine glory (John 3:6; Titus 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:18; John 17:22). In their daily life the believers set their mind on the spirit, walk by the Spirit, live by the Spirit, and are led by the Spirit as the sons of God (Rom. 8:6; Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:14). In the church the believers live a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, they serve by the Spirit, and they keep the oneness of the Spirit in and for the Body of Christ (14:17; Phil. 3:3; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:3-4).

Conclusion

It is difficult to reconcile *Seven's* aim to present a "Christ-centered theology of Holy Spirit" (11) with its radical focus and emphasis on the miraculous. *Seven's* portrayal of the normal Christian life is not only misleading and distracting but potentially dangerous. While the New Testament tells us that signs and works of power will characterize the end of this age, it also indicates that many signs and wonders will not be sourced in the divine Spirit. The two witnesses will manifest signs and wonders, and it may be that the Lord will do many works of power through those believers who represent Him. Yet the Lord Jesus warns us that many (including believers) will be led astray by false Christs and false prophets (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thes. 2:1-10). Nurturing a supernatural seeking in the believers is not only a distraction from the inner operation of the Spirit but a potential danger in opening the believers to operations that, though spiritual, are other than divine.

by Mitchell Kennard

Notes

¹While Crowder contends that "there has been little revelatory teaching on [the] subject" (25) of the seven Spirits, several books by Witness Lee open up the operation of the seven Spirits in a way that gives insight into the Word of God, that helps the believers in their spiritual pursuit, and that gives guidance to the believers' service in the church as the Body of Christ: *The Seven Spirits for the Local Churches*, *The Ultimate Significance of the Golden Lampstand*, and *How to Be a Co-worker and an Elder and How to Fulfill Their Obligations*. In addition, a full elucidation of the operation of the seven Spirits can be found in the October 1996 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, entitled "The Realization of the Triune God—the Life-giving, Sevenfold-intensified Spirit".

²While the death of Christ on the cross is indeed foundational to the Christian life, to define it as the capstone is too limiting in that it ignores the role of the resurrection of Christ in the believers' experience of God's full salvation, which is certainly a matter of living in the Spirit. Without the resurrection, the Spirit, as another Comforter and as the rivers of living water, would not have been able to come both into and upon the believers. According to Romans 6:5, if we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death (this is our experiential foundation), we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection (this is the capstone). In God's economy death and resurrection cannot be separated. Death always brings in resurrection, because death cannot hold the resurrection life. Death is a procedure, but the manifestation of the divine life in resurrection and glory is the goal, the capstone: "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:21).

³Sickness in the church is connected either to the discipline of the Holy Spirit or to our common suffering for the sake of our growth in the divine life. Many in Corinth were sick due to an improper discerning of the body (1 Cor. 11:29-30), and the healing in the Epistle of James is similarly related to offenses in the church (5:14-16). In Paul's case, the Lord would not answer Paul's prayer to remove the thorn from his flesh; instead, his suffering remained and led him into a deeper experience of the all-sufficient grace of Christ (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Commentary on the Book of Revelation

"I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God..." (Rev. 5:6).

Revelation 5:6 also speaks of the seven eyes of Christ, the Lamb, saying that they are "the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." The seven Spirits are the seven eyes of Christ. In Zechariah 3 and 4 Christ is the stone for God's building, and in Revelation 5 He is the Lamb for our redemption. This indicates that the redeeming Christ is the building stone. Both the Lamb and the stone have the seven eyes which are the seven Spirits of God. In Zechariah the seven eyes are the eyes of the stone, while in Revelation they are the eyes of the Lamb.

From the *Life-study of Revelation* by Witness Lee, p. 95