

# THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS' INCORPORATION OF THE TRIUNE GOD IN THEIR SPIRITUAL FUNCTIONS

BY KERRY S. ROBICHAUX

*Because out from Him and through Him  
and to Him are all things.  
To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*  
(Rom. 11:36)

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

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

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

living and work—their virtues, their walk, and their practical service—in light of the Lord's words above about Himself in verses 7 through 11 and, particularly, about them as His believers in verse 12.

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

This incorporation is prominent in the life and works of the Lord Jesus, as seen in the Gospel of John, and in the first two articles in this series on incorporation I attempted to detail the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in His earthly life and works. But this incorporation also extends beyond the earthly life and

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works of Christ and is evidenced frequently in Acts through Jude. In three following articles I presented what appears to be the incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in the work of Christ and of the Spirit in the church after Christ's resurrection and ascension. Then, in another two articles I focused on this incorporation of the Triune God in the character and service of the apostles in Acts through Jude. Finally, in the two previous articles in this series I examined the incorporation of the Triune God by the believers, both in their salvation and in their virtues, walk, and practical service, respectively. In this article I wish to continue my examination of this incorporation by the believers specifically in their various spiritual functions.

**I**n what the Lord said to His disciples in John 14, there is a clear prophecy concerning the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in verse 12: "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes into Me, the works which I do he shall do also; and greater than these he shall do because I am going to the Father." The works that the Lord did are those that He describes in verse 10, and these are works of incorporation: "The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works." What was manifest to all was the speaking of the Lord Jesus, but the intrinsic significance and value of His speaking work was in the Father who abides in Him doing His works. The Lord's open speaking incorporated the Father's operation within Him, and it was this incorporation that characterized all His works. As the Lord goes on to say, the believers are to do the works that He does, and in this context that means that the believers are to incorporate the operation of God in Christ in all that they do. Indeed, the Lord even says that the believers will do works "greater than these," and were this not His own declaration, we could scarcely believe it possible. But in what happens after His death and resurrection, when He comes to the apostles and the believers as the Spirit to indwell them, we do indeed see a greater reach, a greater extent, and a greater impact on the world at large than what the Lord Jesus could have in first-century Galilee and Judea while He was in the flesh. Now having gone to the Father and being given as the Spirit, He is incorporated in the living and service of the believers throughout the ages and throughout the earth. These are certainly greater works, but they are nevertheless His works now in the believers. As He incorporated the Father and lived and worked because of the Father, His believers incorporate Him and live and work because of Him (6:57). In what follows below I wish to present this as particularly true in the believers' various spiritual functions.

While the New Testament writers refer to the spiritual functions of the believers throughout their writings, what is of interest to us here are only those references that involve the believers' incorporation of the Triune God in

those functions. Of course, by definition every spiritual function that the believers have is an incorporation of the Spirit, according to the precise meaning of the word *spiritual* in the New Testament (Fee 28-32). Hence, according to this understanding, I could list and expound on a very large number of references to spiritual functions in the New Testament. But to show the matter of incorporation clearly, it is necessary to examine only those instances where the writers express it explicitly. There are an abundance of them, and this, I believe, will persuade us that the writers of the New Testament understood every spiritual function as an incorporation of the Triune God, even if they do not always express the notion explicitly.

**A**rranging the abundance of these references into categories is perilous. There is much to be said about an approach that simply follows the text, book by book and verse by verse. (Perhaps this can be done elsewhere.) But there are indeed commonalities among the instances sprinkled throughout the New Testament that beg our notice and strengthen our apprehension of what the apostles understood concerning the intrinsic significance of the believers' spiritual functions. To notice these functions is important, and to realize that they all rely intrinsically on the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God within them is, I believe, truly significant. But to see that they fall into the categories that I am placing them in is probably immaterial and not worth defending. Yet I must give some organization to the mass of references I will cover below, and thus, I have roughly assembled them under the various headings that follow. The order of these categories is not particularly insightful, though I have tried to arrange them somewhat logically. The first seven groups (through "In Enjoying the Grace of Christ with Their Spirit") describe functions that are generally positive in nature, while the remaining four groups present functions that are needed in negative circumstances.

### **In Knowing God and the Things of God**

A prominent function that every believer has is to know God and the things of God. The apostles frequently refer to the knowledge of God and of Christ as the essence and goal of Christian experience (e.g., 2 Cor. 2:14; 4:6; 10:5; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 3:8, 10; Col. 1:10; 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:2-3, 8; 2:20; 3:18; 1 John 2:3-4, 13-14). Generally, they simply refer to this knowledge without elaboration, but in the portions below they indicate that the source of this knowledge is the Triune God Himself. Thus, the Triune God is both the source and the object of the divine knowledge that every believer has. For the believers to know God is for them to experience Him operating within them as the source of His self-revelation. In this sense, it is to incorporate His operation within them.

But to us God has revealed them through the Spirit, for

the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also no one has known except the Spirit of God. But we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been graciously given to us by God. (1 Cor. 2:10-12)

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

And as for you, the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone teach you; but as His anointing teaches you concerning all things and is true and is not a lie, and even as it has taught you, abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit. (1 John 4:13)

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)

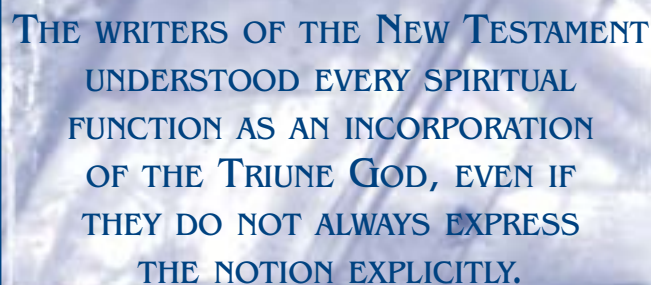
That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. (Eph. 1:17)

Therefore we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease praying and asking on your behalf that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Col. 1:9)

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

Paul tells the Corinthians that the source of Christian knowledge is none other than God Himself as the Spirit, whom all the believers have received (1 Cor. 2:12) and who, he says elsewhere, dwells within them (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14; James 4:5). In 1 Corinthians 2 he speaks specifically of the believers' having the revelation

of "the depths of God" through the Spirit and knowing the things of God through the Spirit. "Only 'like is known by like'; only God can know God. Therefore, the Spirit of God becomes the link between God and humanity, the 'quality' from God Himself who makes the knowing possible" (Fee 99). We need not press Fee's term *quality* too far (and by putting it in quotation marks, he is probably asking us not to); rather, we should take *Spirit* here as a personal term and thus understand Paul to mean that the Spirit is God Himself who self-knows and self-reveals within the believers. Thus, when Paul speaks of the believers knowing the depths of God and the things of God, he indicates that they do so precisely through the Spirit's operation within them, an operation of the third of the Divine Trinity to search and fully know God (an incorporation of Him in itself) and to reveal and make God known. This divine knowing that the believers have is an incorporation of the divine Spirit's operation within them.



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John tells his readers quite emphatically that the knowledge that they all have derives from the anointing that they have from the Holy One (1 John 2:20). The anointing that he speaks of here and in verse 27 is a reference to the operation of the Spirit within the believers. This anointing, he says, is from the Holy One, and in this context *the*

*Holy One* refers to Christ (cf. Luke 1:35; Mark 1:24; Acts 2:27; 3:14). The notion is reminiscent of John's report of the Lord's words in John 15:26: "But when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality, who proceeds from the Father, He will testify concerning Me." In the context of the Lord's imminent and troubling departure from His disciples (14:1-3), the Lord offered the promise of the Spirit as the Comforter. In the context of troubling teachings from many *antixristoi* ("antichrists," 1 John 2:18), the Spirit is presented as the countering *xrisma* ("anointing," vv. 20, 27) within the believers that gives them all the true knowledge to dispel the false teachings of the heretics. This fulfills not only the word in John 15:26 but also that in 16:13: "But when He, the Spirit of reality, comes, He will guide you into all the reality." The operation of the Spirit as the anointing abides in the believers (1 John 2:27) and provides them a kind of knowledge that does not come through human teaching (like what the antichrists can only offer). Rather, as the word *anointing* itself implies, this knowledge results from the deep application of the divine element by the Spirit within the believers



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(Lee, Recovery Version, 1 John 2:27, note 5), and thus, for them to follow that spiritual knowledge in response to the antichrists is to incorporate that application of the Spirit within them.

Later in the same Epistle John tell his readers that the believers have the definite way to know that they abide in God and He in them; that is, He has given them of His Spirit. Alford points out that the expression of *His Spirit* is not to be understood as a non-personal reference to the Holy Spirit but as an indication that the believers, though they have the Spirit personally, do not have Him without measure as only Christ does (4: 492). The Spirit within the believers is not only the token of the mutual abiding between God and His believers (4: 492) but also the active witness to this reality within them, akin to what Paul says in Romans 8:16 (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 John 4:13, note 1). Again, there is a latent reference here to John's report of the Lord's words in John 14:16-20. The Son asks the Father to give the believers the Spirit of reality as another Comforter, who is to abide with them and be in them, and in that day when the Spirit is within them, the believers know that the Son is in the Father—the divine mystery of the Triune God—and, more significantly for themselves, that they are in the Son and the Son is in them. When John writes his Epistles later, the believers are “in that day,” and his testimony here expresses the fulfillment of the Lord's word in John 14. The believers know the truth of this deep reality because they have the Spirit within them, and their knowing is the incorporation of the Spirit's operation within them to make their mutual abiding with God their daily reality.

As he closes this Epistle, John speaks once more about the true knowledge that the believers possess and again ties it to the operation of God within the believers. The Son of God has come and has given the believers an understanding that they may know Him who is true (1 John 5:20). In saying that “the Son of God has come,” John is certainly referring to the incarnation, but in using this particular present tense Greek verb to express it (*ēkei* has with it the force of “and is here”), he means “not simply a historic fact but an abiding operation” (Smith 199). Based on this, the meaning of *has given*, a present perfect in Greek, should be understood as having present significance as well. The Son of God has come and is here with the believers operating within them, and through that operation the believers have an understanding that allows them to know Him as the true One. Similar to what John has said before, the believers have the function to know the true God inwardly through their incorporation of the operation of the Son within them. Then, John continues, “And we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ.” Beyond the believers' *knowing* the true God through their incorporation of the Son's operation within them, there is the reality of their *being* in the true God, which involves

all the benefits and virtues that derive from their incorporation into Him. The believers are in Him who is true by being “in His Son Jesus Christ,” as the grammar of the clause indicates (Alford 4: 514; see also Lee, *Life-study of 1 John* 353—the second phrase is probably not appositive to the first but adverbial). Because God is incorporated in the Son, the believers, who are in the Son, are thereby in the true God. Thus, John concludes his Epistle with these references to the believers' incorporation of the Triune God and to the incorporation of the Father and the Son in the Divine Trinity. Against the heretical external teachings of the antichrists among the believers in his day (and in our day, we should understand), John offers an inner spiritual knowledge and an inner experiential reality that rely on the operations of God within the believers. This knowledge, unlike the heresies, issues from their incorporation of the Son of God within them. They are in Him, and He is in them, making God true and real to them subjectively and against all other false teachings.

In Paul's Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians, he mentions that he did not cease praying for the believers to have the full knowledge of God and His will. In both instances he makes clear that this full knowledge comes through the operation of the Spirit within the believers. In Ephesians 1:17 his prayer is particularly for “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him.” Most English translations use the lowercase *spirit* in this verse probably to indicate that the word is not a direct reference to the divine Spirit. Alford points out that “certainly it would not be right to take *pneuma* here as solely the Holy Spirit, nor as solely the spirit of man: rather is it the complex idea, of the spirit of man indwelt by the Spirit of God, so that as such, it is His special gift” (3: 82). Paul prays that God would cause the Spirit who indwells the believers' spirit to provide wisdom and revelation for the believers to fully know God and His economy inwardly. As we saw in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul here again considers the Spirit as the God who knows and reveals Himself within the believers. The full knowledge of God is “the element and sphere of the working of this gift of the Spirit” (3: 82); thus, the Spirit within the regenerated spirit of the believers operates to make God known to them inwardly. What they know of God comes to them through their incorporation of God the Spirit's operation within them.

In Colossians 1:9 Paul mentions the same prayer as in Ephesians with some variations. Here he prays that the believers would be filled with the full knowledge of God's will. To be filled with this knowledge is greater than merely having it. In so expressing his wish, Paul is no doubt hoping that the believers would fully manifest in their Christian and church life the full knowledge that he is praying for. Further, he prays that this filling with the full knowledge would be “in all spiritual wisdom and

understanding.” The exact nuance of the modification that is signaled by *in* is difficult to pin down. The phraseology in Colossians is reversed from that in Ephesians:

a spirit of wisdom and revelation	<i>in</i> the full knowledge (Eph. 1:17)
the full knowledge	<i>in</i> all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col. 1:9)

We have accepted Alford’s view on Ephesians 1:17 that *in* refers to the sphere and element of the Spirit’s operation within the believers’ spirit. But what about *in* in Colossians 1:9? Does it refer to the sphere and element in which the full knowledge consists (akin to Alford), or does it refer to the means by which the believers are filled with the full knowledge? Fee is decidedly in favor of the latter (641), and he is probably correct since it is likely that Paul has the same notion in mind in both places even though he has expressed it in reversed parallelism. The full knowledge that the believers can have and that Paul prayed for comes through the Spirit’s operation within their regenerated spirit. In Colossians, as almost always in the New Testament, *spiritual* is simply the adjectival form of the noun *Spirit* (641), and the reference is directly to the Spirit’s function and operation to provide wisdom and understanding within the believers. Paul is speaking of “knowing God’s ways by means of the wisdom the Spirit gives” (642). Finally, in Colossians Paul refers to understanding, in contrast to revelation, which he mentions in Ephesians. We should not simply equate the two notions, but based on the parallelism of the two passages, they are no doubt related in Paul’s thought. Much has been written on the meaning of revelation in the Bible (e.g., *TDNT* 3: 563-591), but it may be sufficient to simply rely on the basic and literal meaning of the word as an unveiling of something hidden. Thus, its point of focus should be the Spirit’s operation to make the hidden things of God known to the believers. *Understanding*, on the other hand, takes the believers’ apprehension as its point of focus, and in this context it is an apprehension that is enabled by and infused with the Spirit in the believers’ spirit. *Revelation* refers more to the Spirit’s operation to make known, while *understanding* refers more to the believers’ incorporation of that operation, to apprehend. When the Spirit operates within the believers to unveil the deep and hidden things of God, the believers have the understanding by their incorporation of His operation.

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In the last portion above, 1 Corinthians 2:15-16, Paul again uses the word *spiritual* in reference to the believers knowing the things of God. This time, however, he uses the Greek word *pneumatikos* as a substantive (i.e., an adjective acting as a noun; cf. English *the poor*) to describe a person who so experiences the Spirit that he or she incorporates Him even in his or her thought and thus becomes a spiritual person. Alford indicates that this is a person who is ruled by the human spirit that has experienced “the infusion of the Holy Spirit, to quicken and inform” it (2: 488). This kind of person, the *pneumatikos*, is in opposition to the *psyxikos* of the preceding verse. The latter lives a life that incorporates and expresses only what is in his or her fallen soul; the former incorporates what is in his or her regenerated spirit, that is, the Spirit of God Himself, mentioned in the preceding verses. A spiritual person, by incorporating the Spirit of God in his or her thinking, discerns all things but is discerned by no one.

To prove this latter point, Paul offers the rhetorical question: “For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him?” Paul has the *psyxikos* in mind as the subject of the question. The soulish person, who lives completely according to the fallen human soul and completely without the Spirit of God, cannot discern the *pneumatikos*. What is interest-

ing is the transition in this context from the Spirit to the Lord and then to Christ. Paul frames his question using the Greek translation of Isaiah 40:13 (slightly paraphrased). The Hebrew text reads, “Who has directed the Spirit of Jehovah...,” but the Septuagint has, “Who has known the mind of the Lord...” The Septuagint uniformly translates *Jehovah* in Hebrew as *Lord* in Greek; thus, we should understand that *the Lord* in 2:16 is a reference to Jehovah. But more importantly, Paul accepted this equation of the Spirit of Jehovah with the mind of the Lord in the Greek translation, and this indicates that he understood the Spirit as the Communicator of the mind of God (“the Lord”). He then goes on to gloss *the mind of the Lord* with his own phrase *the mind of Christ*.

To him these minds are identical (cf. Matt. xi. 27; John v. 20, etc.). Such interchanges betray his “innermost conviction of the Godhead of Christ” [quoting Ellicott 47]...Christ lives and thinks in the *pneumatikos* (vi. 17, 2 Cor. xiii. 3 ff., etc.; John xv. 1-8); the *unio mystica* [“mystical union”] is the heart of Paul’s experience. (Findlay 785)

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The believers, who have the Spirit and who incorporate the Spirit in their discerning of all things, in fact have the mind of Christ because the Spirit incorporates Christ within the believers, and this mind of Christ is the mind of the Lord because Christ incorporates God the Father as Lord. There is but one mind of God—this is a basic tenet of the theology of the Trinity—which is sourced in God the Father (the Lord), expressed in God the Son (Christ), and realized within the believer (the spiritual man) by God the Spirit, and in 1 Corinthians 2 Paul references the one mind of God in terms of the three of the Godhead. For Paul the believers as spiritual ones discern all things because they incorporate the one mind of God held by the three of the Divine Trinity within them.

**T**he Christian life is not, of course, simply a life of knowing, but knowing God and the divine things of His economy is a crucial function that all believers have through their regeneration by the divine life. And yet according to the portions above, this function to know God and His economy is more than a reflex of the divine life; it is rather the issue of the operations of the Triune God within the regenerated spirit of the believers. Further, knowing, as the operation of the Spirit within the believers, differs from what is held in human concept naturally or what can be derived from external teachings. The believers have the full knowledge of God and His economy only through the operation of God within them, and for this operation the apostles prayed deliberately and ceaselessly. While they preached, while they taught, while they wrote, they also prayed diligently for the Triune God within the believers to operate so that what they announced would be fully apprehended through the believers' incorporation of that divine operation. Theirs was indeed a co-laboring with the operations of the Triune God within the believers (cf. Col. 1:28-29).

### **In Serving God**

Throughout the New Testament the believers are admonished to serve God (cf. Matt. 4:10; Rom. 12:1; 1 Thes. 1:9; Heb. 9:14; 12:28), and serving God is one of the coming blessings for God's redeemed in eternity: "His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:3-4). Thus, serving God is one of the believers' most basic functions in their relationship to God. The writers of the New Testament speak of serving God in various ways, as some of the verses mentioned above indicate, but in the portions below the apostles indicate that the believers should serve God through their incorporation of the operations of the Triune God within them.

For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. (Phil. 3:3)

For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in this is well pleasing to God and approved by men. (Rom. 14:17-18)

For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers. (Rom. 1:9)

But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter. (Rom. 7:6)

Do not be slothful in zeal, but be burning in spirit, serving the Lord. (Rom. 12:11)

You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 2:5)

**I**n Philippians 3:1-3 Paul opens a strong offensive against the Judaizing missionaries who had apparently been undermining his proper work according to God's New Testament economy in Macedonia. There is probably no stronger denunciation of these subverters in Paul's writings than in verse 2, and in verse 3 he vividly contrasts their service with that of the New Testament believers. The Judaizers preached circumcision as an outward token of their adherence to the law, but Paul realized that they missed the whole point of circumcision in the first place. As he says in Romans 2:29, "Circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God." Circumcision should not be merely some outward practice but the believers' inward reality that their natural strength is useless before God and therefore cut away. Further, true circumcision is of the heart and in spirit, that is, based on the Spirit's operation within the regenerated spirit of the believers. It is with this understanding that Paul says what he says in Philippians 3:3. First, he asserts that "we are the circumcision." The subject pronoun in Greek is emphatic, and thus, the sense of this first clause is: "It is we (not they!) who are the circumcision." The Philippians were not wrong in thinking that they were of the circumcision, but they were wrong in following those who practiced circumcision in the flesh alone. Then, he explains who the circumcision really are; they are "the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh." Those who have circumcision as an outward practice have their confidence in the flesh, that is, in the natural strength of the fallen human being. But those who have circumcision as an inward reality have this natural strength cut off through the Spirit's operation in their regenerated spirit, and this renders their service to God a completely different quality; they are actually serving God by the



Spirit of God, not by the strength of their fallen flesh. Fee points out that in using *of God* to modify *the Spirit*, Paul is probably making “a pointed contrast to those who think of themselves as rendering service to the one God not only by being circumcised themselves but also by urging (insisting?) that Gentiles offer themselves to God in the same way. True service *to God* is that which has been engendered by the *Spirit of God*” (753). “The Christian life fashioned by the Spirit is true *latreia* [‘service, worship’]” (TDNT 4: 65). True service to God issues from the believers’ incorporation of the Spirit of God within them. They serve God by God, that is, through their incorporation of Him, and not by themselves.

In Romans 14, after speaking of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,” Paul speaks of serving Christ “in this” (vv. 17-18). Righteousness, peace, and joy are virtues that the believers express in their Christian and church life through their experience of the Holy Spirit. Thus, these virtues issue from the believers’ incorporation of the Spirit in their daily living. I examined the believers’ incorporation of the Triune God in their virtues in my last article in this series (“Virtues”). Here we should notice that the incorporation of the Holy Spirit also constitutes service to Christ.

The phrase *in this* has been interpreted in various ways, and in some Greek manuscripts it has been revised to read “in these things” (reflecting one interpretation). But all possible interpretations include the notion that the three virtues mentioned are in the Holy Spirit and that they provide the basis for service to Christ. Paul tells the believers that serving Christ not in outward practices but by incorporating the Spirit as their genuine virtues is what pleases God and what people around them respect and admire. In these two verses Paul mentions God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ, and this reflects his continual understanding and appreciation for the mutual operations of the Triune God in the believers’ experience. In his view God’s kingdom, that is, God’s reigning, is not simply outward and over people but, more significantly, from within the believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit. When the believers express these excellent virtues through their incorporation of the Holy Spirit in their Christian and church life, they are living in God’s kingdom as His subjects, and in this way they serve Him. But Paul wishes to make clear that living in God’s kingdom in this particular way is in fact service to Christ, for Christ

as the incorporation of God is indeed the King in this kingdom. For the believers to serve Christ most properly is to let God reign through His Spirit within them. This pleases God and, as an added benefit, appeals to men.

In writing to the believers in Rome, Paul declares that he served God in his spirit (Rom. 1:9). While some students of the Bible struggle with the notion of the human spirit (as distinct from the human soul), there can be little doubt that here Paul is speaking of the spirit as a component of the human being. His mentioning of *my spirit* makes clear that he recognized the existence and function of a component in the human being that is distinct from the human soul (cf. Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:27; Col. 3:23; 1 Thes. 5:23). But, as Fee carefully defends in a number of ways, the phrase “also refers to the Spirit of God at work in [Paul’s] own spirit,” and to indicate the double reference he offers *S/spirit* in his own translation of this verse (484-

486). This use of *spirit* is similar to what we saw above in Ephesians 1:17, where we could also correctly employ *S/spirit*. Further, the Greek text of Romans 1:9 closely resembles what Paul says in Greek of “the ones who serve by the Spirit of God” in Philippians 3:3. He uses the same special Greek verb for service (*latreuō*) in both places, and we should understand

from this that when he says he offers this kind of service to God in his spirit, he also implies that he offers it by the Spirit of God. Thus, Paul implies that he serves God through the operation of the Spirit in his regenerated human spirit; that is, he incorporates the divine operation in his service to God. Paul is speaking specifically of his service to God as an apostle and a herald of the gospel of God’s Son, but in doing so, he echoes his understanding in Philippians 3:3 concerning the service to God of all the believers. We can assume that he likewise expects all the believers to serve God in their spirit as he does.

Later in his letter to the Romans Paul indeed indicates that the believers should serve God in their spirit: “We serve in newness of spirit” (7:6). God as the object of the believers’ service is not expressed here, but following the thought of verse 4, where the believers are said to “bear fruit to God,” we should understand God as the intended object. The English versions are divided in their capitalization of *spirit* in this verse, but either way the divine Spirit is indicated, either directly with capitalization or, probably more accurately, indirectly without it. As he spoke of his

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own service to God in his spirit, Paul probably is referring to the believers' service to God similarly as being in their spirit, which has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Again, the believers' incorporation of the Spirit in their spirit is indicated. But in this context Paul tells the believers further that because of the Spirit's operation in their spirit, their service to God is imbued particularly with the quality of newness. Alford points out that in Greek the genitive expression *newness of spirit* refers to a state in which the spirit is the ruling element (2: 376). Thus, this newness issues from the Spirit's indwelling of the believers' spirit for their service to God. It is contrast to the oldness that results from adherence to the letter of the law in those who serve God according to the Old Testament dispensation. What makes the New Testament believers' service to God continually new is God the Spirit, who Himself is continually new (cf. Hosea 14:8), dwelling and moving within them; it is a service to God through their incorporation of Him. Those who serve God according to the Old Testament dispensation do so according to the letter of the law by the strength of their fallen flesh and thus remain in their old condition continually; it is a service to God but apart from Him.

Paul mentions the believers' service one more time in Romans 12:11. Here he couples *serving the Lord* with *be burning in spirit*. While the two notions are grammatically distinct, there must be some relationship, even if only a loose one, between them; thus, I include it here. Again, the basic textual issue is the exact meaning of *spirit*. Fee notes that "English translations favor 'spirit'..., while commentaries favor 'Spirit'" (611). After a thorough consideration of both possibilities, he tends "to lean once more toward middle ground," again opting for "the inelegant 'be fervent in S/spirit'" (613). Inelegant as it is typographically, *S/spirit* again captures the believers' elegant incorporation of the divine Spirit in their spirit, and I am repeatedly thankful for Fee's appropriation of the hybrid spelling. The believers should not be lukewarm (Rev. 3:16), but their fervency should not be natural either. Rather, the Spirit is a fire within their spirit (cf. 1 Thes. 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:6), and when they serve the Lord by their spirit, the divine Spirit glows through them, like fire through iron. All who touch such believers touch the glowing and burning God within them through their incorporation of Him.

Peter also touches the believers' service to God in a way that involves their incorporation of the operation of the Triune God within them. In 1 Peter 2:5 he says that the believers are being built up to be "a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The offering of spiritual sacrifices by the believers as a holy body of priests is both their service and their worship to God, just as the actions of the Old Testament priesthood were both service and worship to

God. *Spiritual* does not relate merely to immateriality in a general sense, nor does it simply point to a contrast with the physical character of the Old Testament priestly service (though that is certainly implied), but, as always in the New Testament, it is the adjective form of *Spirit*. Thus, the sense of *spiritual* is "of, related to, or belonging to the Spirit" and denotes the Spirit's inner operation in the believers' open offering. The believers offer up their sacrifices by the Spirit's operation within them, and this gives their offering its quality of being acceptable to God. Thus, the believers incorporate the Spirit's operation within them to offer up their sacrifices to God. Further, as Alford points out, *through Jesus Christ* should be connected to *offer up* and not to *acceptable to God*, "seeing that not merely the acceptability, but the very existence, and possibility of offering, of those sacrifices depends on the mediation of the great High Priest" (4: 346). Christ, as the ultimate and abiding High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26, 28; 8:1, 3; 9:11; 10:21), alone can offer sacrifices that are fully acceptable to God, and if the believers are able to offer any sacrifices at all, it must be through Him as the reality of the offering priest. Thus, the believers incorporate Christ's operation within them as they offer their sacrifices to God. This also makes their sacrifices acceptable to God. Here Peter's apprehension of the Trinity is clear, and more significantly, he relates the operations of the Triune God to the believers' experience in their service to God. In serving God, they offer sacrifices by the Spirit within them, and in doing so, they also incorporate Jesus Christ as the true High Priest. It is not that the Spirit and Christ are operating separately; in fact, it is the Spirit who incorporates Christ as the real High Priest within them. Christ, realized as the Spirit in the believers, offers up through the believers these sacrifices to God. The Spirit operates to make Christ's operation real in the believers' actions, and this confluence of operations is received by God for His acceptance and satisfaction. There is but one working of God within the believers, making their sacrifices spiritual and filling their offering with Christ's priestly service, both by means of their incorporation of the Triune God within them, and thus, the believers' service in Christ's service by the Spirit's service is unto God the Father.

Before moving on from 1 Peter 2:5, we should ask, What is the practical meaning of the spiritual sacrifices that the believers offer through their incorporation of the Triune God within them? Witness Lee offers a very concise and complete answer in a note on this verse:

The spiritual sacrifices that the believers offer in the New Testament age according to God's economy are: (1) Christ as the reality of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament types, such as the burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin offering, and trespass offering (Lev. 1—5); (2) the sinners saved by our gospel preaching, offered as



members of Christ (Rom. 15:16); and (3) our body, our praises, and the things that we do for God (Rom. 12:1; Heb. 13:15-16; Phil. 4:18). (Recovery Version, note 8)

Peter is no doubt considering the whole compass of spiritual sacrifices when he mentions them here, and Lee's perceptive collection of New Testament sacrifices is probably what Peter is referring to.

According to the portions in this section, the service of the New Testament believers to God should fully incorporate the operations of the Triune God. It is not doing things for God apart from God but doing things through God unto God. He alone can provide the acceptable value and worth to all Christian service, and the believers render such service to Him only through their incorporation of His operation, mainly as the Spirit, within them. Yet it is clear that in the believers' service, as in all facets of their Christian and church life, the operations of the Triune God are involved and incorporated. "Because out from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

### In Glorifying God and Christ

In its simplest concept the purpose of the Christian life is to glorify God (cf. John 15:8; Eph. 3:21). References to glory pervade the New Testament—they occur in every book except Philemon and the Epistles of John—and the notion is so large that it often remains ill-defined or, worse, bound to natural misconception. It is almost too trite to mention, but when the believers glorify God, they do just that—they make God manifest. They do not express themselves in the process, nor do they simply offer "glorious" expressions to God from themselves apart from Him. While this may not match the concept of many Christians, it does match the concept of the New Testament writers. It is beyond the scope of this study to try to rectify that problem, but the portions below may offer initial help by showing that when the believers glorify God and Christ, they do so through their incorporation of the operations of the Triune God within them.

If anyone speaks, as speaking oracles of God; if anyone ministers, as ministering out of the strength which God supplies; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 4:11)

Being filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:11)

For as many promises of God as there are, in Him is the Yes; therefore also through Him is the Amen to God, for glory through us to God. (2 Cor. 1:20)

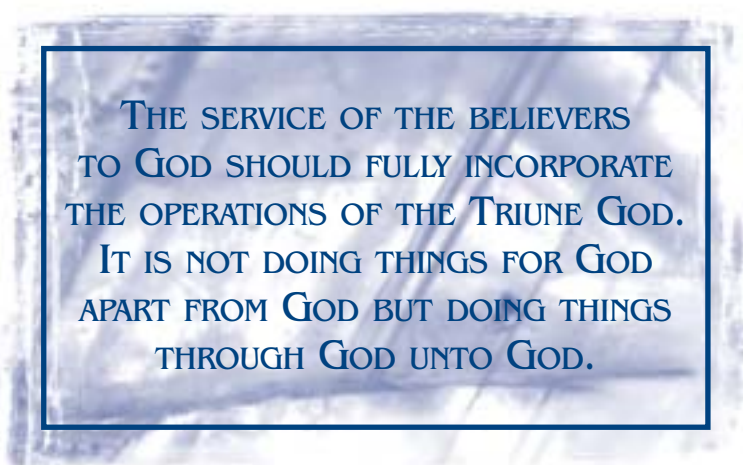
Now the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 15:5-6)

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

So then, my brothers, you also have been made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another, to Him who has been raised from

the dead, that we might bear fruit to God. (Rom. 7:4)

In 1 Peter 4:10 Peter exhorts the believers to minister the various gifts that they have received from God as good stewards of His varied grace. Then, in verse 11 he offers two particular applications of their ministering service. These are probably not random examples but particular and general instances of what he is talking about in verse 10. The implication of the first application is that speaking is a particular mode of the believers' exercise of their gifts according to the grace of God. In everything that the believers do, even the most practical of services, there should be seasoning with spiritual speaking, as described in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. But in both applications what is of paramount importance is not the action of the believers but the operation of God within the believers. This is Peter's point precisely. When the believers speak, what they speak should be the oracles of God Himself, not merely their own speaking. Thus, their speaking should incorporate God's speaking; God should speak in their speaking. Likewise, all their ministering (the general application) should issue from



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the strength that God supplies, and this supply of strength must be from within them if it is to be practical strength at all. Thus, their ministering service should incorporate God's supplying operation within them. In both applications the believers' incorporation of God's operation is indicated, and because He operates within the believers as indicated, He can be glorified in all things that the believers do in word and in deed. In this sense, glory is God expressed through His operations within the believers. But in addition to this, Peter says that God is glorified through Jesus Christ, and again he expresses his apprehension of the Divine Trinity. There does not seem to be a need for him to add the modifier *through Jesus Christ*, except to indicate his understanding and respect for Christ's function to glorify the Father (cf. John 12:28; 13:31-32; 14:13; 15:8; 17:4-5; cf. 21:19). By the addition he implies, I would say strongly, that Jesus Christ is to be identified in function with the God who speaks within the believers and who supplies them inwardly in their ministering service, mentioned earlier in the verse. God in Christ operates within the believers as they speak and as they serve, and by this, God is glorified in Christ through them. God is incorporated in Christ, and Christ is incorporated in the believers to glorify God.

In Philippians 1:11 Paul prays (v. 9) that the Philippians would be "filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." The fruit of righteousness refers to the open expression, in the believers' living, of the inner reality of righteousness within them. This righteousness is not simply the righteousness of their initial justification before God, but "the whole purified moral habit of the regenerate and justified man" (Alford 3: 157). It is righteousness not as a virtual attribute that has been imputed to them (as per a forensic justification) but as a subjective virtue that is experienced by them through the Spirit's indwelling (as a continuation of their initial justification). This righteousness, Paul does not fail to say, is "through Jesus Christ," and we must understand that the reference is not simply to Christ's work of redemption as the basis of the believers' righteousness (though this is the beginning of the full meaning of righteousness here) but to His ongoing existence and operation within the believers as righteousness itself (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). The fruit of righteousness that the believers express in their living is not at all anything of themselves; rather, it is the manifestation of the operation within them of Jesus Christ, who alone is the righteousness of God. When the believers are filled with this fruit of righteousness, they incorporate the reality of righteousness, that is, Jesus Christ Himself, in their living and express Him as their righteousness. This incorporate living of Christ as the believers' living righteousness is "to the glory and praise of God." Alford notes that *to the glory and praise of God* is to be connected with *filled* (3: 157). Hence, when the

believers are filled with the fruit of righteousness, God is glorified in them. *Glory* can sometimes be understood as praise in the New Testament, but here it seems that Paul is teasing out two distinct senses in the compound phrase, similar to what he does in Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14. Glory to God is found in the incorporate living of the believers, while praise to God is found in others who find reason to praise Him because of the believers. These others eventually include all the creation, which eagerly expects His glorification in His sons (Rom. 8:19-21). When the believers live out Christ as their righteousness, the practical result is the glorification of God. The notion is profound. Christ dwells in the believers as righteousness itself (and here the Spirit's function as the reality of Christ in the believers, though not mentioned, should not go unnoticed), and the believers incorporate Him fully in their living; they are filled with Him as the fruit of righteousness. Their incorporation of Christ glorifies not Christ but God, according to the text, and this is so because Christ indeed incorporates God. As He lives and operates within the believers, and as they express Him openly, it is not they who are glorified, nor strictly Christ, but God, who is incorporated in Him and in them in Him.

To the Corinthians Paul says that in Christ is the Yes of all the promises of God and "through Him is the Amen to God, for glory through us to God" (2 Cor. 1:20). Paul's thought is that in Christ all the promises of God are fulfilled, as many as there are. He is the Yes, the confirmation, to every promise of God. Because of that, the apostles and the believers can offer a genuine Amen to all God's promises. But their Amen does not originate from themselves but is instead "through Him." When the apostles and believers offer their Amen to God's promises, they incorporate the operation of Christ within them to affirm His promises. He is therefore the fulfillment of all God's promises as well as the source of the resounding affirmation of all God's promises in His believers. Because Christ is such to the apostles and believers, God is glorified through them. Again, through Christ's operation in His believers, the believers glorify God, not Christ (strictly speaking), and this, because Christ is incorporated in them, and God is incorporated in Him. Alford points out that this last clause probably "had reference to *the Amen uttered at the end of prayers*" (2: 634), which would be similar to Paul's mentioning of *Amen* in 1 Corinthians 14:16. It may be a lost practice for some believers today or a formalized one for others, but for Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:20 it is the verbal expression of the believers' incorporation of Christ's operation within them for the practical glorification of God through him and the early believers.

In Romans 15:5-6 Paul expresses the wish that the believers would glorify God in one accord with one mouth. This

is always easier said than done, but he includes in the exhortation references to the operation of God within the believers, which alone enables the believers to fulfill such a wish. In referring to God as the God of endurance and encouragement, he indicates that God generated endurance and encouragement within the believers. This is no doubt done through the appreciation of the Scriptures mentioned in verse 4, but it is nevertheless the operation of God within the believers for their experience of endurance and encouragement. Through this experience of the operation of God within them, Christ is made real to them, and they find the way to be of the same mind according to Him. The mind that was in Christ, which Paul refers to in verse 3, is “the same mind” that should operate in the believers through God’s operation within them. Just as Christ did not please Himself, so the believers should have the same mind and thus be likewise toward one another, and this is possible in reality because the God of endurance and encouragement is operating within them to make the same mind their mind. What results is one accord with one mouth. Inwardly the believers have harmony, and openly their expression is one. When this happens, God is glorified in them. Their oneness in mind and expression occurs through God’s operation within them, and thus, it becomes His glorification in the believers. That Paul qualifies God as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” further indicates that God’s operation within the believers involves His making His Son real within them. What in the Scriptures is Christ as pattern (vv. 3-4) becomes a reality to the believers through their incorporation of God’s operation within them, and as they live out His same mind in one accord with one mouth, they glorify God, and particularly as He is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last two portions above glorifying God is not mentioned specifically but allusions to it are made, and in each case the believers incorporate the operations of the Triune God to provide the glory alluded to. In Philippians 1:19-20 Paul speaks of magnifying Christ in his body, and this is perhaps one of the most direct references to incorporation in all of Paul’s writings. Paul’s earnest hope was that he would make the Christ whom he loved and served large through his living in his hard circumstances while imprisoned. To do this, he relied on “the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Among Greek scholars there

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is some disagreement about the precise meaning of the genitive *Spirit* in the phrase *the bountiful supply of the Spirit*. Is the Spirit the One who supplies (subjective genitive) or the supply that is given (objective genitive)? The question is almost moot, since in either case the other meaning is at least mildly implied, but probably the objective genitive works better in the context (Alford 3: 160; Fee 741; Lee, Recovery Version, note 4, allows both meanings: “Such a Spirit has, and even is, the bountiful supply...”). The Spirit of Jesus Christ was a bountiful supply within Paul, and this enabled him to magnify Christ in his body. Paul refers to the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ because the Spirit makes Jesus Christ real to him inwardly by incorporating Christ within him. “It is Christ resident in him by the Spirit who alone will cause both that Paul—and therefore the gospel—would not be brought to shame and that Christ would be magnified through him” (Fee 742). There in prison in Rome Paul sought to manifest

Christ in his physical situation, dire as it was, and he could do this because the Spirit dwelt in him as the One who incorporates Jesus Christ and makes Him real to the believers inwardly. Christ was not a mere external pattern to Paul but a very present person dwelling in him through the Spirit’s operation. Because he had such a reality within him through the Spirit’s incor-

poration of Christ, he could in turn incorporate Christ as a reality in his physical living and thereby magnify Him to all. His bonds were manifestly “in Christ among the whole Praetorian guard and to all the rest” (1:13) through his incorporation of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in his imprisonment.

In Romans 7:4 Paul tells his readers that because they have been made dead to the law and have been thereby joined to the risen Christ, they can bear fruit to God. Bearing fruit to God is in opposition to bearing fruit to death in the next verse and refers to the whole expression of the believers’ new life in Christ, which is made possible through the operation of the Spirit in the believers’ regenerated spirit (v. 6). Because it refers to the whole expression of their living, it is synonymous with the believers’ glorifying God in their living, and thus, I include it here. The believers can bear fruit to God because they have been joined to Christ and therefore draw virtue from Him to glorify God. In this chapter Paul speaks analogically of marriage and the law that governs it, but his point is not merely judicial. On a deeper level he is appealing to the



notion that marriage is a union that brings to the one the detriments or the benefits of the other, and it is the detriments and benefits that are in focus in verses 4 through 6. Placing the believers in the role of wife in the union, he points out that in their former marriage they bore fruit to death. Their former husband is the old man in 6:6. The detriment that they drew from him was sin, and they bore fruit to death through their union with him. But through the body of Christ on the cross, the believers have been made dead to their former husband and are now joined to the risen Christ as their new Husband. In union with Him, they draw from Him His benefits and can therefore bear fruit to God. It is not because of who they are or what they do that the believers bear fruit to God; it is wholly a matter of whom they are joined to and from whom they derive virtue as their benefit. Thus, it is completely of Christ that they can bear fruit to God. They incorporate Him as their virtue to bear fruit to God. Two verses later, in verse 6, Paul restates his point, this time without analogy and this time with reference to the Spirit who indwells the regenerated spirit of the believers. Bearing fruit to God now becomes serving God in newness of S/spirit. We examined this verse above in the section on serving God, but here it is important to see that in Paul's mind being joined to the risen Christ to bear fruit to God is identical with serving God in newness of S/spirit. His apprehension of the full operation of the Triune God is evident. The believers, that is, those who experience God's economy in faith, have entered into the experience of being made dead to the law through their union with Christ in His death, and through their union with Him in His resurrection they experience Him as true virtue and incorporate Him in their living in order to bear fruit to God. But this experience is realized within them through the Spirit's operation in their regenerated spirit. The Spirit is the realization of Christ within them, for the Spirit incorporates Christ within the believers, making Him real in their experience. Christ indwells them as the Spirit in their spirit. When the believers express this operation within them, their fruit is not to Christ directly nor to the Spirit directly but to God directly. Hence, Christ as the Spirit in the believers' regenerated spirit expresses and glorifies God through their incorporation of Him in their Christian and church life.

### In Boasting in God and in Christ

In his writings Paul frequently mentions boasting, and what is surprising is that often he not only condones it but even seems to encourage it. He does, of course, mention boasting in a negative sense, but it is striking how often he speaks of boasting as almost a virtue for his apostolic work in particular and for the Christian life in general. It is sometimes hard not to bristle at this. One would suspect that perhaps in Greek the family of words for boasting has some positive connotation, but this is not the case. "The

meaning of this group is 'to boast,' 'boasting,' usually in a bad sense, so that we find warnings against it in the philosophers and satirists" (*TDNT* 3: 646). The older English translations and lexicons often render these words with some form of the verb *glory*, for example: "I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:17, KJV); "I protest by that glorying in you, brethren, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Cor. 15:31, RV [1885]); "*to glory* (whether with reason or without)" (Thayer, on *kauchaomai*). Many newer versions and lexicons have abandoned the attempt to give the ancient Greek word group an ethically proper modern sense and have used some form of *boast* to render this family of words (cf. NAB, NASB, NRSV). Linguistically, it seems a bit feigned to try to take the Greek word group in a positive sense. Rather, what we are probably looking at is yet another of Paul's very sophisticated expressions of a subtle reality that he enjoyed. His boasting is almost ironic because the basis of it is always either God's operation in him, as in Romans 15:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:31, or his natural weaknesses and afflictions, as in 2 Corinthians 11:16-30. To borrow his own phrase elsewhere (Rom. 3:27), where then is the boasting? Stripped of self-assuredness or founded on what one should be ashamed of, Paul's boasting is devoid of vanity and self-promotion, yet he flatly calls it boasting, and he encourages the believers to likewise boast in God and in Christ.

For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh. (Phil. 3:3)

For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled, and not only so, but also boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom. 5:10-11)

The first portion above presents in a full way the principle for the kind of boasting that Paul encourages. The believers can never boast in themselves, that is, in what they can do or have done; rather, they can only boast in Christ Jesus, that is, in what He does in and through them, and because of that, they can have no confidence in the flesh, in the strength and virtue of their natural and fallen humanity. They can boast in Christ Jesus because they serve by the Spirit of God, and as we saw earlier, this means that their true service to God issues from their incorporation of the Spirit of God within them. Christ brought an end to the law and therefore to the realm of works according to flesh, and through their experience of the Spirit of God the believers enjoy the reality of Christ as the end of law and flesh and serve God according to Him in this way. Just as they incorporate the Spirit of God in their service, they also incorporate Christ as the end of the law and of works for their boasting here.

In Romans 5:10-11 Paul tells the believers that if they were reconciled to God through Christ's death, much more they will be saved in His life, and not only so, but they will be saved while boasting in God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The boasting in verse 11 results from the believers' experience of being saved in the life of Christ in verse 10. This salvation, which is distinct from mere salvation from perdition, depends on the believers' participation in the divine life that Christ has in Himself (John 1:4; 5:26) and that He has made available to His believers experientially through His resurrection (John 5:21; 10:10; 4:14; 7:38-39). The believers can be saved in Christ's life because He is life and He is dwelling within them as life. They incorporate Christ as their saving life, and because of this, they boast in God through Him who indwells them and brings reconciliation to them experientially.

### In Praying, Praising, and Giving Thanks

Probably the most crucial function of all believers and certainly their most spiritual one is prayer. The Lord gave specific instruction about prayer in His earthly ministry and presented Himself as the substantial pattern of One who prays often (Matt. 6:5-13; 14:23; 26:36-44; Mark 1:35; Luke 9:18, 28-29; 18:1; John 17). Paul likewise exhorts the believers to pray always, as he himself did (Rom. 1:9; 12:12; 15:30; Eph. 1:16; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:9; 4:6; Col. 1:3, 9; 4:2; 1 Thes. 1:2; 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1). In the portions below we will see that prayer is a spiritual function in the most radical sense of the term, that is, that prayer is of the Spirit and, as such, should be executed through the believers' incorporation of the Spirit's operation. Along the same lines, we should also see that when the believers offer praise and thanksgiving to God, they should do so through the operation of Christ within them.

Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. But He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to God. (Rom. 8:26-27)

And not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan in ourselves,

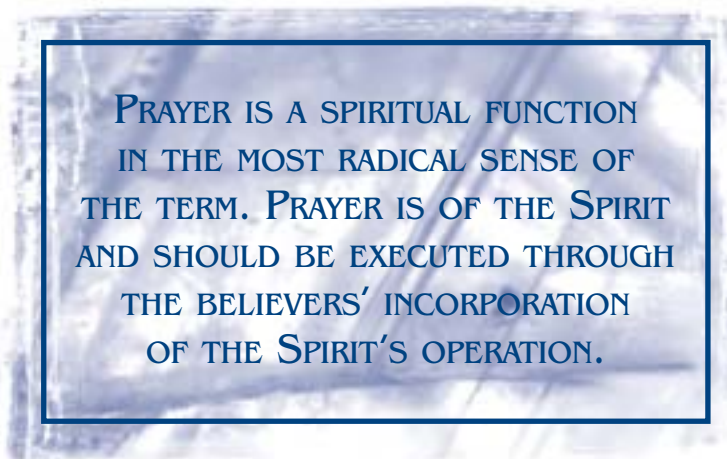
eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body. (Rom. 8:23)

But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20-21)

By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints. (Eph. 6:18)

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

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



And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:2-3)

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that. (1 John 5:16)

Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name. (Heb. 13:15)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all because your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Rom. 1:8)

And whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Col. 3:17)

In Romans 8:26-27 Paul describes the believers' prayer as a function that relies fully on their incorporation of the operation of the Spirit within them. In reading down the context of these verses, we see that Paul is speaking of prayer not for menial matters but for the high peak of

God's full salvation. In verse 22 he points out that creation in general is looking to the fulfillment of God's work among humankind; it "groans together and travails in pain together until now." Then, in verse 23 he particularly focuses on the very locus of God's work among humankind, "we ourselves..., who have the firstfruits of the Spirit." Creation groans for freedom from the slavery of corruption, and this freedom will be practically accomplished by the glorification of the children of God (v. 21). Thus, the believers are ground zero for creation's emancipation, and if there is a general and vague groan within creation for emancipation from corruption, there is a particular and intensified groan within the believers for the glory of being full sons (i.e., "sonship") with its consummation, that is, the redemption of their bodies from mortality to immortality. Only a dull believer fails to identify with this particular groan for sonship. But how to reach the goal of God's full salvation so as to mature unto sonship in full glory is really beyond the comprehension of any believer who has not yet arrived. This is the child's anticipation, hope, and longing for adulthood without any real notion of how to arrive there. This is "our weakness" that Paul mentions in verse 26, the not knowing "for what we should pray as is fitting." Yet though it is beyond the believers' current condition to know how to pray for so high a goal, the Spirit joins in to help in that weakness. What issues, contrary to what we may expect, are not lofty and articulate prayers but prayers according to the believers' actual condition, that is, "groanings which cannot be uttered." And yet, these groanings—indeed their groanings—are His groanings. "The Spirit Himself intercedes" with these groanings. The fact that Paul calls them groanings speaks to the believers' condition in their praying action, but Paul nevertheless identifies the Spirit as the One who is in reality interceding. The believers pray as they are in their current condition, but their prayer incorporates the deep operation of the Spirit within them, who joins in and fits in with their current condition, and it is His operation that makes their prayers effectual, for "He intercedes... according to God" (v. 27). In the final analysis, the prayer that propels the believers toward their full salvation, and indeed the creation toward its ultimate freedom, is fully the believers' incorporation of the Spirit's interceding operation within them.

This understanding of *groanings* in verse 26 should govern the meaning of *groan* in verse 23. But this is not immediately clear when one reads verse 23. Apparently, the believers groan in themselves the same way that the whole creation groans in verse 22. While this seems logical, Paul clearly distinguishes the believers by saying that they "have the firstfruits of the Spirit." The characterization is not casual at all. *The firstfruits of the Spirit* is not a reference to some gift bestowed by the Spirit, but "this genitive is appositional and means 'the firstfruits, the Spirit himself'" (Fee 573). "The firstfruits of the Spirit

are simply the Spirit Himself as the firstfruits" (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1). In referring to the future glorification of the sons of God, Paul distinguishes the believers from the rest of creation by saying that they have the foretaste of that future glory in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Because they have the Spirit as the foretaste of what is to come, their groaning is not nebulous or ill-defined, as it must be for the old creation; rather, when they groan in themselves, they groan with and through the Spirit as the firstfruits of what is to come. The statement appears to be proleptic and requires the later verses for its full interpretation. If this is the case, then in verse 23 we have another reference to the believers' incorporation of the Spirit's operation in their prayer. The believers groan in themselves through the operation of the Spirit as the firstfruits of their future reality.

Jude, after warning the believers about the ungodly apostates among them (vv. 4-19), exhorts them to take full advantage of the operations of the Divine Trinity for their own safeguarding and building up in their most holy faith (vv. 20-21). "The entire Blessed Trinity is employed and enjoyed by the believers in their praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping themselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of our Lord unto eternal life" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 21, note 3). The love of God here is, according to Alford, God's love for the believers (4: 541), just as the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ is Christ's mercy toward them, especially in the state of degradation and apostasy that Jude is addressing (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 2, note 1). These blessings are secured through the believers' "praying in the Holy Spirit." This utterance is unique in the New Testament but is in line with Romans 8:26, which we saw above, and Ephesians 6:18, which we will see below (Alford 4: 541). To pray in the Holy Spirit is to pray by, through, and with the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believers' regenerated spirit. It is prayer by incorporation. And through the Spirit's operation in the prayer of the believers, the believers are kept in the reality of God's love to them and led into the experience of the Lord's mercy toward them.

In Ephesians 6:17-18 Paul encourages the believers to "take up God's salvation as a helmet and the Spirit as a sword "by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit." The translation quoted here, from the Recovery Version, appears to be alone in rendering *spirit* in lowercase, but the intention is to capture the notion of the Spirit's indwelling of the believers' regenerated human spirit (Lee, Recovery Version, note 3). This is akin to Paul's more direct statement in 1 Corinthians 14:14: "my spirit prays." But in any case, in Ephesians 6:18 the operation of the divine Spirit in the prayer of the believers is clearly indicated. As we have seen in Romans 8:26 and Jude 20, also we see here that the believers should pray by, through, and with the operation of the



Spirit in their regenerated spirit; it should be their incorporation of His operation within them.

In Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 we find a vivid description of the believers' declaration of both their genuine sonship to God and their affection for Him as their Father: "Abba, Father." It can easily escape our notice that this is in fact prayer, but if Paul is describing anything that is actual at all, it must be something uttered in the believers' prayer to God. Fee classes this utterance with similar "Spirit-inspired prayer (1 Cor. 14 passim)" and points out that "even though the *Abba*-cry is very much the realized experience of individual believers, the cry itself is most likely to be heard in the gathered worship of the community" (409 and note 142 there). Thus, in practicality this declaration is more commonly expressed as the corporate prayer of the believers in a meeting of the church, probably in the Lord's table and supper (1 Cor. 10:16-

17, 21; 11:20, 24-25; cf. Matt. 26:30; Heb. 2:12). But what is interesting in these two verses is the Spirit's prominent operation and how Paul speaks of it. In Romans he says that "we cry," but in Galatians it is the Spirit who is "crying." No doubt, the believers are the agents of the audible declaration, but it is nevertheless the Spirit who is crying out

in their words. They incorporate the Spirit's crying out in their crying out. Further, the Spirit Himself is called "the Spirit of His Son," and this refers to the Spirit's function to incorporate the Son within the believers and make Him real within them. The Son dwells in the believers as the Spirit, and when the Spirit operates, the Son operates through Him. Thus, the Son of God, who is eternally so and thus the one reality of sonship, cries out as the Spirit in the believers to the Father. Because the real Son is incorporated in the Spirit's operation and because the believers incorporate the Spirit as reality in their prayer, they cry out as sons in reality to God the Father. They are sons by their incorporation of the Spirit of the Son within them, and their prayer that declares their sonship incorporates the declaring of the Son through the Spirit to the Father with His same affection and love (cf. Mark 14:36).

In Acts 13:2 we see a practical example of the believers' incorporation of the Spirit in their prayer. Five prophets and teachers, mentioned in verse 1, are said to be "ministering to the Lord," and by itself this expression probably

is general in meaning. But the fact that their ministrations were accompanied by fasting seems to indicate that this was a ministry of prayer. This is further confirmed by the next verse, where prayer is directly mentioned along with fasting and where the interplay between the verb tenses in verses 2 and 3 helps to define the exact nature of the ministering in verse 2. In verse 2 *ministering* and *fasting* are present participles in Greek that describe the habitual and ongoing activity of the five prophets and teachers, while in verse 3 the Greek verbs for *fasted* and *prayed* are aorists that point to singular and particular actions by these believers. "This was a *new* fasting and *special* prayer" (Alford 2: 139), which was in contrast to their usual ministry to the Lord and fasting. But what mainly concerns us here is that while these five were praying and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke. Luke attributes this speaking to the Holy Spirit, but we should understand that it was a speaking that came through one of the five there. Alford suggests

that the Spirit spoke "by one of the prophets present" (2: 139), and that seems logical since prophets, by definition, speak for and speak forth God. Thus, as these five prayed, at least one of them incorporated the Spirit's operation within and spoke that forth to the others. What happened here need not be taken as some miraculous manifestation of God's

operation, as what we see at Pentecost in Acts 2:4. Rather, what is spoken of in verse 2 is the normal ministry of prayer in the church by faithful serving ones in which the Spirit's operation is incorporated. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit as the direct agent of this speaking probably to make clear that the sending of Barnabas and Saul was a divine commission and not a human one. But even in that divine sending, God had to be incorporated in the actions of the praying prophets and teachers.

In his first Epistle John speaks of prayer that gives life to others (5:16), and this should be understood as the believers' incorporation of God's operation through their prayer. Some commentators understand God as the subject of *he will give life*, but this is against the grammar of the verse, which naturally takes the asking believer as the subject. In reality it is God who gives life, "but the words mean, he, interceding for his brother, shall be the means of bestowing life on him: 'rogans vivificabit' [asking, he will give life], as the æthiopic version" (Alford 4: 509).

It means that such an asker, who is abiding in the Lord,

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IN REALITY TO GOD THE FATHER.

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who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), becomes the means by which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the ones for whom he is asking. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 3)

**I**t is difficult to tell exactly how this giving of life is accomplished. Is the prayer and the giving of life the same action so that the prayer enables God to supply life to the sinning brother? Or does the prayer come first and then the giving of life come later so that God gives life to the sinning brother through the care by the asking brother? John does not specify. Alford comments that "this bestowal of life by intercessory prayer, is not to be minutely enquired into" (4: 509), and perhaps it is better left unexamined. But in either case God's operation to give life is incorporated by the asking believer, and John is happy to assign to the asking believer the agency of giving life. In a sense, knowing the exact way that the believers can give life according to this verse may not be necessary. However it is done, it must be done through prayer, and the prayer that is offered becomes the way for God's life-giving operation to occur. John's word here is unique in the New Testament in that it indicates that prayer can be more than simply asking; it can also be a ministry of life to those for whom the prayer is offered. When prayer has this function, it must be clearly the believers' incorporation of the operation of God, who alone is life and can give life.

Turning now to the praise that the believers should render to God, we find in Hebrews 13:15 the exhortation to offer to God continually a sacrifice of praise "through Him." The antecedent of the pronoun is *Jesus* in verse 12, who is outside the camp of Judaism and apart from all the Jewish observances for worship to God. The writer of this book exhorts the believers to offer a different kind of sacrifice for their worship of God, a sacrifice of praise, and to do this continually through Jesus. But exactly how do the believers offer praise to God through Jesus? The contrast is to the Jewish ritualistic observances by means of which the Jews offered sacrifices to God; thus, Jesus Christ now becomes the means by which the believers offer their praise as sacrifice to God. The sense of *through Him* need not be diluted to mean simply "because of Him" or "on the basis of His work," as though only the memory of Christ's death and resurrection is being contemplated (though it should not be forgotten). Rather, the base sense of the Greek preposition *dia* with its genitive object must be preserved, and we should understand that the offering is made by means of Jesus. Because this offering is so deliberately tied to "confessing [God's] name" later in the verse, it must be viewed in light of what the writer has already mentioned similarly in 2:12: "Saying, 'I will declare Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the church I will sing hymns of praise to You.'" The continual offering of sacrifices of praise in 13:15 is, I submit, the

practicality of the Son's declaration of the Father's name and of His singing hymns of praise to the Father in 2:12. It is in this sense that the believers' offering of praise is through Him. He is in the midst of the church, and practically speaking, this means that He is dwelling within the believers. (This cannot be understood in the same sense as *in the midst* in John 20:19 and 26.) And He is declaring the Father's name to them inwardly and singing praise to the Father in their singing praise through Him. Thus, the believers offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually by incorporating Christ the Son's operation to declare the Father and sing hymns of praise to Him.

In Romans 1:8 Paul tells his readers that he thanked God "through Jesus Christ." Again, we need to ask how, exactly, Paul offered this thanks through Jesus Christ. Olshausen cautions, "We must not regard this as a mere phrase, but as a true expression of the apostle's deepest consciousness. Thanksgiving and prayer are only pleasing to God when offered through the Spirit of Christ dwelling in the heart" (476). In saying that he thanked God through Jesus Christ, Paul is not falling back on Christian formulaic language, as we often do today; expressions like this were not formulaic yet. Nor does he mean that he thanked God due to and resting on Jesus Christ, as a first impression of the text may suggest. Such a meaning would seem superfluous here. Rather, we do best if we understand that Paul thanked God by means of Christ's operation within him. This is a particular instance of what Paul talks about in Ephesians 2:18: "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father," and matches what the Lord Jesus Himself said in John 14:6: "No one comes to the Father except through Me." Even in the seemingly simple matter of giving thanks to his God, Paul realized that his approach to Him had to be by means of Christ. Paul's giving of thanks was no doubt a special form of his prayer, and as we have seen elsewhere in his writings, to him prayer was an exercise of incorporating the operation of the indwelling God. This is the full import that we should perceive in the phrase *through Jesus Christ*. Paul thanked his God by incorporating the operation of Jesus Christ within him.

**I**n Colossians 3:17 Paul encourages the believers to do the very same thing that he does in Romans 1:8: "giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Alford characterizes the Lord here, through whom thanks are given, "as the one channel of all communication between God and ourselves, whether of grace coming to us, or of thanks coming from us" (3: 239). This channel is made real and, therefore, practical and effectual through Christ's indwelling of the believers. What we have seen related to Romans 1:8 applies here without modification. As he did himself, Paul encourages the Colossians to incorporate the operation of the indwelling Christ in their prayer to offer thanks to God the Father through Him.

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## In Having Access to the Father

The access to the Father through Christ, which we have seen above to be practically experienced in the prayer of the believers, is itself an incorporation of the operation of Christ by the believers.

But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have become near in the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:13)

For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father. (Eph. 2:18)

In whom we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Him. (Eph. 3:12)

In Ephesians 2:11-18 Paul unveils the marvelous truth concerning Christ's deeper work on the cross to produce in Himself one Body, in which both believing Jews and believing Gentiles gain access through Him to the divine Father. In verse 13 he declares that the Gentiles, who were once far off—from God's Christ, from His people, from His covenants of promise, indeed, from God Himself (v. 12)—have become near in Christ Jesus, "i.e., near to Christ, to Israel, and to God's promise. This equals being near to God and all His blessings" (Lee, Recovery Version, note 3). But to our point here, the Gentiles have become near to God "in Christ Jesus." This phrase, which is, of course, Paul's signature expression of the believers' mystical union with Christ, shows that access to God through Christ's work on the cross depends not simply on the worth of His historical work but more significantly on the believers' genuine union with and incorporation of Him. The fact of Christ's redeeming work is indicated by the last phrase in this verse—in *the blood of Christ*, while the actual basis for the reality of being near to God is indicated by the first phrase—in *Christ Jesus*. In Paul's view, prominent throughout his writings, the believers have been put into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) and now draw from Him continually the virtues and benefits that derive from the processes of death, resurrection, and ascension that He experienced historically. The believers have been incorporated into Him by faith, and by virtue of that, they now incorporate His operation within them as the reality of their Christian and church life. (This corresponds to the Lord's word in John 15:4: "Abide in Me and I in you.") In

the context of Ephesians 2:11-18, being in Christ Jesus provides the believers the way to draw from Him the benefit of having access to God, as He alone has full access to Him (cf. John 14:6, 9).

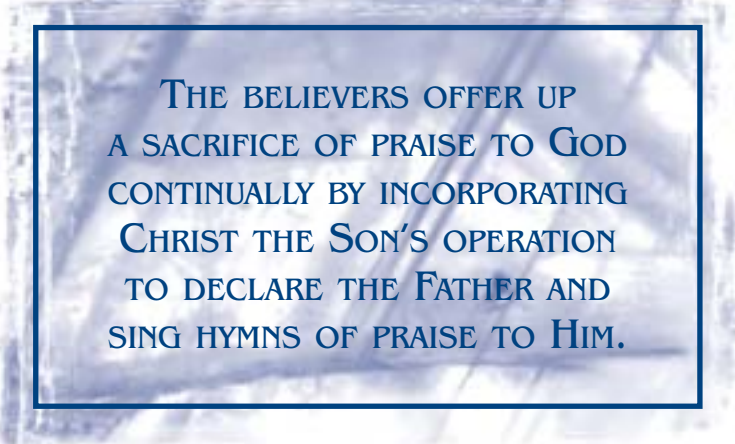
A few verses later Paul provides further detail concerning the believers' access to the Father, and he relies on his understanding of the operations of all three of the Divine Trinity to show this. In verse 13 he speaks of this access as being "in Christ Jesus"; in verse 18 he says that it is "through [Christ]." Probably here the emphasis is on the process of Christ's work on the cross, which he has detailed so profoundly in verses 14 through 17. The believers are in Christ Jesus, who has gone through such a tremendous process to form the believing Jews and Gentiles into one Body. By being in Him, all that He has gone through becomes their reality as well, so that now it can be said that through Him both Jews and

Gentiles have access to the Father. But their experiential reality of this marvelous fact is "in one Spirit." Witness Lee comments:

First, both the Jewish and the Gentile believers were reconciled in one Body to God (v. 16). That was a positional matter. Then they both have access in one Spirit unto the Father. This is experiential. In

order to enjoy experientially what we possess positionally, we need to be in the Spirit. (Recovery Version, note 3)

Fee offers a similar observation: "What has made one Body possible is the death of Christ; what makes the one body a reality is their common, lavish experience of the Spirit of God. As they live together in the Spirit they now have access to the Father" (684). Again, when Paul speaks of the believers being in one Spirit, he is speaking at once both of their being incorporated into God and of their drawing from that the virtue and benefit of the Spirit for their Christian and church life. They are in the Spirit, and the great benefit of that is that they now can incorporate the Spirit's operation within them. In this context, the precise benefit of their incorporation of the Spirit's operation within them is their access to the Father. The Spirit makes real in their experience all that Christ has accomplished on the cross to produce the one Body that is able to access the Father. When they incorporate the operation of the Spirit to make Christ's work to produce the Body, they experience access to the Father.



THE BELIEVERS OFFER UP  
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In Ephesians 3:12 Paul once more refers to the access to God that the believers have, repeating the point that such access is in Christ (“in whom”). Again, their incorporation of Christ’s operation is indicated, as we saw in 2:13. Here, however, Paul adds the point that this access is “through faith in Him.” In doing so, he makes clear that faith is the subjective means by which the believers apprehend this operation. It is faith in Him, that is, faith that takes Christ as its object, not just by way of comprehending His past work but more so by way of apprehending His present operation.

### In Enjoying the Grace of Christ with Their Spirit

The last positive category of the believers’ spiritual functions that I wish to examine is their enjoyment of grace. Of course, grace in the Bible is a major matter that has a spectrum of connotations, and it is certainly beyond the scope of this article to grapple with the full import of this central matter. But it is helpful to focus on those few passages where Paul relates the believers’ enjoyment of grace directly to the operation of Christ within them. Granted that these passages are a minority in the full collection of verses that mention grace in the New Testament (13 of 128), they nevertheless seem to form the core meaning for grace in its highest denotation. While grace can be understood as something as simple and as outward as giving money toward the needs of the saints (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6, 19), there is even then the notion of God’s operation within the believers that motivates and energizes the outward action (cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-5). The grace within as God’s operation becomes the grace without as the believers’ action, and this happens through the believers’ incorporation of God’s inward operation of grace in their outward action of grace. Thus, this core of meaning of grace, which we hope to see below, is worth paying special attention to.

Through whom also we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and boast because of the hope of the glory of God. (Rom. 5:2)

You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 2:1)

And the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 1:14)

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. (Rom. 16:20; cf. 1 Cor. 16:23)

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

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (1 Thes. 5:28)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. (2 Thes. 3:18)

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

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25)

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

In Romans 5:2 Paul says that through Christ the believers have obtained access to “this grace.” The phrase *this grace* is intended to take up the principle of grace that has been at the base of Paul’s argument since 3:21, that is, that justification is by grace. Yet this grace is not merely the unmerited favor that God displayed in Christ’s redeeming sacrifice and in His justifying freely those who believe in that sacrifice. It is that particularly in 4:4 and 16, but in chapter 5 this grace is something that the believers have gained access to by faith and something that they now stand in and boast in; hence, it is something that is very experiential to them, being appropriated to them by their exercise of faith. And this grace as something experiential comes to them through the Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly the basis of their justification is through Jesus Christ with His one righteous act (5:18), but their ongoing enjoyment of this justification, which is this grace that allows them to stand firmly and even boast boldly, is also through Jesus Christ. Because He indwells them as their grace, they are able to stand and even boast. Their standing and their boasting are their incorporation of Him as their grace inwardly.

In 2 Timothy 2:1 Paul exhorts his younger co-worker to “be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.” For Paul grace is the divine energy that the believers need for all aspects of their Christian and church life. It is easy to construe this as divine virtue that emanates from God and yet is apart from Him. But here Paul makes it clear that grace is in Christ Jesus, using his signature phrase to describe the relationship. Because the believers have been incorporated into Christ Jesus through faith, they draw from Him the power and supply that they need for their Christian and church life; thus, they incorporate Him as their power and supply, and this is grace.

In all the remaining verses above, except the last one, Paul refers to grace simply as being “of the Lord Jesus Christ” in one way of expressing it or another. Typically, he does this to conclude his Epistles, as the instances above indicate (apart from 1 Timothy 1:14). That he does this repeatedly shows his conviction that the believers must experience grace in order to enter into the reality of what his Epistles present. These short endings to his Epistles are

indeed benedictions but not empty ones; rather, they express his full hope that the believers will enjoy the grace of the Lord in all that they do in accordance with what he has variously written. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely something given by the Lord but is the Lord Himself given to them as their divine supply. This is most clearly seen in Paul's fullest benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14, where all three expressions *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit* are to be understood as genitives of apposition which refer, respectively, to Christ as grace, God as love, and the Spirit as fellowship. When the believers experience the Lord's operation within them as their supply for their Christian and church life, they experience Him as grace. Thus, *the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ* refers to the believers' incorporation of Christ's operation within them as their supply. Further, in Galatians 6:18, Philippians 4:23, and Philemon 25 Paul says additionally that Christ as grace is with the believers' spirit.

Fee's comment is interesting: "Here, for reasons that are past finding out, the 'with you' [of Paul's other benedictions] becomes 'with your spirit'...And at this point scholarship has tended to draw blanks" (468-469). That Paul says "your spirit" in each instance compels us to understand the human spirit, which he some-

times elsewhere combines with his references to the divine Spirit (cf. Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 12:11; Eph. 1:17). I think the notion is akin here, even if it is not exactly so. Paul easily refers to the believers' spirit in its regenerated state as the dwelling place of God (cf. Eph. 2:22), and as such, it is the place where God in Christ abides within the believers as their divine grace. Fee (469) and Alford (3 : 67) suspect that the mentioning of "your spirit" in these benedictions point to Paul's affection for the recipients of his letters, but that seems to be a shot in the dark based on an imperfect apprehension of Paul's realization of the function of the regenerated human spirit for the believers. The grace which is in the Lord Jesus Christ resides in the regenerated spirit of the believers because that is the locus of the indwelling of God in Christ as the Spirit. The Lord dwells within the spirit of the believers, and thus, grace is there, too. Paul says as much in what are probably his last preserved words: "The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you" (2 Tim. 4:22). Based on his other benedictions, it is not hard to see that in this final word Paul is teasing out his full understanding of the matter: the Lord is grace, and grace is with the believers in their regenerated spirit.

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LIFE, AND THIS IS GRACE.**

The benediction serves as a healthy reminder of how easy it is for the believers to enjoy grace. Christ is the One dwelling in their spirit and, as such, is always available for them to turn to and experience for their Christian and church life. This experience is their incorporation of Christ's operation within their spirit, and this is grace.

### In Being Established

In the remaining sections of this article I wish to examine several verses that show the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God in negative circumstances. The first of these negative circumstances is implied in the believers' need to be established. In the portions below, where being established or being made to stand is mentioned, there is behind this notion the thought of the adversity that assails all genuine believers, and the establishing that the apostles speak of in these portions depends

on the believers' incorporation of the operations of the Triune God within them.

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

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, that is, the proclamation of Jesus Christ,

according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages. (Rom. 16:25)

But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. (2 Thes. 3:3)

So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. (1 Thes. 3:13)

But the God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you. (1 Pet. 5:10)

Having been rooted and being built up in Him, and being established in the faith even as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2:7)

Who are you who judge another's household servant? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will be made to stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom. 14:4)

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Early in his Epistle to them Paul tells the believers in Rome that he longed to impart to them some spiritual gift so that they might be established (1:11). Then, near the end of his long Epistle he expresses the hope that God would establish them according to his gospel. These two verses frame his letter and provide the underlying motive for it. The gospel had reached the imperial capital, and the new church there no doubt needed strengthening and establishing. As an apostle to the Gentiles (11:13; 1 Tim. 2:7), Paul had the commission to do what he could to impart this strengthening and establishing to the believers in Rome. Eventually he would have the opportunity to be there personally (Acts 28:16-31), but for now this Epistle would be his best opportunity. While Paul could impart this establishing, his language indicates that he was quite clear that it was God who was accomplishing this in the believers. In 1:11 he uses the passive voice verb *be established*, and thus, the agent of the action is ambiguous. In 16:25 the Agent is clear; it is God Himself who is able to establish the believers in Rome. Further, the believers can be established (by God) through Paul's impartation of "some spiritual gift." As I mentioned near the beginning of this article, in the New Testament the word *spiritual* is always a direct reference to the divine Spirit; it is simply the adjective form of the noun, as Fee carefully proves (28-32). Thus, the spiritual gift here is a gift imparted to the believers directly by the Spirit. Fee glosses the phrase as "a special Spirit gifting" and a "Spirit gift" (488), and Alford provides this more expanded paraphrase: "springing from the Spirit of God, and imparted to the spirit of man" (2: 317). This springing from the Spirit, this gifting of the Spirit, is, practically speaking, His operation within the believers, which has as its effect their strengthening and establishing. Thus, Paul understood that for the believers in Rome to be established, God had to operate as the Spirit within them and provide to them a special dispensing as a gift. But what exactly is this spiritual gift? Fee considers the possibility that something along the lines of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 or Romans 12:6-8 is meant, but he concludes that "this common interpretation represents a thoroughly noncontextual view of this term." Rather, he continues, the gift is most likely Paul's "understanding of the gospel that in Christ Jesus God has created from among Jews and Gentiles one people for himself, apart from Torah" (488). This is probably correct, as it matches what Paul says in 16:25, that God "is able to establish you according to my gospel." The spiritual gift that God gives in order to establish the believers is the truth of the gospel that was imparted through Paul's ministry as an apostle. But what is of primary interest to us here is that Paul's gospel is not merely his announcement of the truth of God's economy; rather, in his own view it is in reality the means by which God as the Spirit operates within the believers to establish them. Paul's gospel, which is not just the news of God's saving action but more deeply the plan of His full

economy to make of the Jews and the Gentiles one Body (12:4-8), is what is given to the believers in Rome by God as a gift of the Spirit and through which God operates within them to establish them as the church as the Body of Christ there in Rome. As the believers in Rome accept his gospel fully, God operates in them as the Spirit and "gifts" them the establishing that they need as a new church in a hostile environment. Thus, the believers' establishing happens when they incorporate God's operation within them according to the gospel that Paul imparts to them as a gift of the Spirit. At the beginning of his Epistle Paul has only a longing that this will happen, but by the end the longing has turned into a benedictory prayer. No doubt, he succeeded in his wish to see the believers in Rome established, for indeed his letter to them became the "spiritual gift" that he wanted to impart. It presents his gospel in the fullest way among all his writings, and when he ends it, I believe that he refers to the substance and content of the entire Epistle as "my gospel." It is according to this gospel, his gospel, the spiritual gift, that God is able to establish the believers in Rome. We do not know if later Paul was able to impart anything more in person than what he imparted here in his Epistle, but the spiritual gift which he gave to the Romans and according to which God operated to establish them could hardly be surpassed. Even today it is the gift that keeps on giving, and according to it, God is still operating as the Spirit within the believers to establish them. "To the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Rom. 16:27).

In 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, and 1 Peter 5:10, God is said to establish the believers. There can be little doubt that the believers experience this establishing by incorporating His direct operation within them. The establishing is certainly internal, as Paul explicitly indicates by saying that God establishes the believers' hearts, and thus, God's operation to perform this establishing must be internal. Peter says that it is the God of all grace who will Himself establish the believers, and by this we should understand that His establishing occurs through His direct operation within the believers as multifarious grace. Witness Lee notices the full compass of God's saving economy in this verse and therefore interprets *all grace* in this way:

*All grace* refers to the riches of the bountiful supply of the divine life in many aspects ministered to us in many steps of the divine operation on and in us in God's economy. The initial step is to call us, and the consummate step is to glorify us, as mentioned here in *who has called you into His eternal glory*. Between these two steps are God's loving care while He is disciplining us, and His perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and grounding work in us. In all these divine acts, the bountiful supply of the divine life is ministered to us as grace in varied experiences...The



God of such grace will perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground the persecuted believers after they have suffered a little while. (Recovery Version, 1 Pet. 5:10, note 2)

In Colossians 2:7 Paul says that the believers are “being established in the faith,” and as we saw in Romans 1:11, the passive voice verb masks the agent of the action. Because of this we cannot say that Paul is referring directly to the believers’ incorporation of God’s operation, though that is probably implied in the passive verb. But it seems that the establishing here issues from the believers’ being rooted and built up, and these operations are “in Him,” that is, in “the Christ, Jesus the Lord,” in whom the believers should walk (v. 6). I do not think that the first three actions described in this verse—being rooted, being built up, and being established—are independent and unrelated; rather, a progression is indicated, and this depends on the believers being in Christ. As we have seen again and again, by their being in Christ, the believers are able to experience His operation within Him and draw from Him virtue and benefit for their Christian and church life. Here they incorporate His operation in order to be established in the faith in a way that matches what they have been taught in the apostles’ ministry.

In Romans 14:4 Paul tells the believers that the Lord is able to make His servants stand. Again, God’s direct operation within the believers is indicated, and their being made to stand is the result of their incorporation of His operation within them. Alford understands that “this argument is entirely directed to the *weak*, who uncharitably judges the *strong*,—not vice versa. The *weak* imagines that the *strong* cannot be a true servant of God, nor retain his steadfastness amidst such temptation” (2: 452). This may indeed be the case, since it is doubtful that the strong would be tempted to pass judgment on others’ abstinence and wonder if it would be acceptable to the Lord. Paul seems to be saying that what may be a cause of stumbling to one believer (“he who is weak,” v. 2; “he who does not eat,” v. 3) may not be a cause of stumbling to another (“he who eats,” v. 3), because it is the Lord who is operating within the latter to make him stand. The contrast is not simply between weak believers with overly sensitive consciences and strong believers with more mature consciences. Rather, the contrast is between believers who live merely according to conscience and those who live according to God’s strengthening within

them. These latter ones incorporate God’s operation within, and to their own Master they are made to stand, not through any virtue of their own but through their incorporation of His operation.

### In Overcoming Negative Things

In a more direct category of negative circumstances are the portions below that relate to the overcoming life that the believers should live. In each instance we wish to see that the believers live the overcoming life by incorporating the operations of God within them.

But in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us. (Rom. 8:37)

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:57)

PAUL UNDERSTOOD THAT FOR THE BELIEVERS IN ROME TO BE ESTABLISHED, GOD HAD TO OPERATE AS THE SPIRIT WITHIN THEM AND PROVIDE TO THEM A SPECIAL DISPENSING AS A GIFT.

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain: The Spirit, whom He has caused to dwell in us, longs unto envy? But He gives greater grace; therefore it says, “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:5-6)

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these oppose

each other that you would not do the things that you desire. (Gal. 5:17)

In Romans 8:35-39 Paul speaks of the many things that can assail the believers and threaten them, but he declares that “in all these things we more than conquer through Him who loved us.” *Him who loved us* probably refers to Christ in view of the preceding expression *the love of Christ* in verse 35 (cf. also Rev. 1:5), and thus, it is through Christ that the believers can more than conquer tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and even sword. But how do the believers more than conquer through Him? This cannot be other than through His operation within them. In verse 35 Paul speaks only of not being separated from the love of Christ, which could be external to the believers and unrelated to their actual experience. But in verse 37 he is speaking of the practical experience of the believers, and he says that their overcoming of all negative things is through Him as the instrument. (It is interesting to note that some correctors of the text tried to weaken this instrumental sense to read “because of Him who

loved us” [manuscripts D, F, and G], and this correction strengthens the argument for the instrumental meaning of the original.) Because He is in them, the believers have the experiential way to remain attached to the love of Christ, and as they incorporate Him in their daily living, they more than conquer all the things that would attempt to separate them from His love. A few verses later Paul repeats the notion that nothing can separate the believers from this love, but this time he calls it “the love of God” (v. 39). This is not a different love separate from the love of Christ; rather, it is a love that is incorporated in the love of Christ. Witness Lee explains it well:

The love of God is the source of His eternal salvation. This love is in Christ and has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit (5:5). Nothing can separate us from this love of God (vv. 38-39). In God’s salvation this love to us has become the love of Christ (v. 35), which does many marvelous things for us through the grace of Christ until God’s complete salvation is accomplished in us. These marvelous things provoke God’s enemy to attack us with all kinds of sufferings and calamities (vv. 35-36). However, because of our response to the love of God in Christ, these attacks have become benefits to us (v. 28). Hence, we more than conquer in all our afflictions and calamities (v. 37). (Recovery Version, v. 39, note 1)

A similar thought is expressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:57. Here the victory is over sin and death. Of course, we can understand this as something pertaining only to the future, when “this mortal will put on immortality” (v. 54), but because Paul uses the present participle, it is probably the case that he has something more than the simple fact of a future benefit in mind. Rather, God’s action of giving this victory over sin and death is viewed as persistent and corresponds to what Paul says about being freed from sin and death in Romans 7:7—8:13. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says that God gives the believers this victory through the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Romans 8:2 he says that “the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.” The latter passage expresses in more detail what the former says in passing. The same victory is being viewed, and the same means of this victory is referred to. What is through our Lord Jesus Christ is, upon closer examination, the operation of the law of the Spirit of life that the believers experience in Christ Jesus. Paul gives thanks to God because through Christ’s operation in the believers, which is by the law of the Spirit of life that they enjoy in Him, they receive and experience the victory over death and over sin. Death operates through sin, and sin operates through the law (1 Cor. 15:56), and through the Spirit’s incorporation of Christ Jesus as the law of life within the believers, the law of sin and of death is overpowered and annulled. When the believers

incorporate His operation within them in this particular aspect, they enjoy the victory over sin and death that is given by God.

The last two portions above, one from James and one from Paul, speak of the Spirit’s operation within the believers to enable them to overcome the lusts of the flesh. Two points should be made explicit here. First, what the Spirit does in this regard He does within believers, and thus, it is His operation within them. James says clearly that God has caused the Spirit to dwell in the believers and gives them grace. Paul does not directly say that the Spirit indwells the believers, but the sense is clear from the situation described that the Spirit is in the believers. Further, the Spirit in Galatians 5:17, as in the preceding verse, refers to the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believers’ regenerated human spirit. (We could easily employ Fee’s convention [25], mentioned earlier, and render *S/spirit* in verses 16 and 17.) Second, as a result of this divine operation within them, the believers are able to overcome the lusts of the flesh. Paul says this explicitly (“that you would not do the things that you desire”); James only implies it by mentioning the “greater grace” and contrasting “the proud” with “the humble.” But in either case the believers incorporate the operation of the Spirit within them to overcome the lusts of the flesh.

### In Suffering Persecution

It is (or should be) the common lot of all the believers to suffer persecution for their faith in Christ (Matt. 5:10-12; Mark 10:30; John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12). In the portions below the believers can be seen to incorporate Christ in their persecutions.

And he fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And he said, Who are You, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute. (Acts 9:4-5)

And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? And I answered, Who are You, Lord? And He said to me, I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you persecute. (Acts 22:7-8)

And when we all fell to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads. And I said, Who are You, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you persecute. (Acts 26:14-15)

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

Yet with meekness and fear, having a good conscience, so

that in the matter in which you are spoken against, those who revile your good manner of life in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet. 3:16)

In Paul's experience of meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus, he received a unique revelation of Christ that few of us are ever blessed to receive. I am not referring to the flash of light from heaven and the audible voice but to Christ's own declaration that He is incorporated in His persecuted believers. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? I am Jesus, whom you persecute." This is not simple empathy that Christ has for His believers but His own genuine experience through His indwelling of them. Witness Lee comments,

A corporate "Me," comprising Jesus the Lord and all His believers. Saul did not have this revelation. He thought that he was persecuting Stephen and other Jesus-followers, who were in the Way, which he considered heresy (Acts 24:14). He did not know that when he persecuted these he persecuted Jesus, for they were one with Him by being united to Him through their faith in Him. He considered that he was persecuting people on earth, never thinking that he touched anyone in heaven. To his great surprise a voice from heaven told him that He was the One whom he was persecuting and that His name was Jesus. To him this was a unique revelation in the universe! By this he began to see that the Lord Jesus and His believers are one great person—the wonderful "Me." This must have impressed and affected him for his future ministry concerning Christ and the church as the great mystery of God (Eph. 5:32) and laid a solid foundation for his unique ministry. (Recovery Version, Acts 9:4, note 1)

The last two verses above speak of the believers being persecuted because their manner of life expresses the Christ who indwells them. In each instance their living is in Christ, and as we have seen repeatedly, this phrase refers to their mystical union with Christ, by which they draw benefit and virtue from His operation within them. Here the benefit and virtue that they incorporate results in a godly living and a good manner of life. This result is not conduct that they themselves produce but their incorporation of Christ Jesus, who lives within them. The believers should desire this kind of living, that is, a living that manifests the operation of Christ Jesus within

them continually, and they should expect that this kind of living, which manifests the Christ who is within them, will stir up the hatred for Christ and persecution of Him that characterizes the world under the hand of the evil one. In this sense, persecution validates the godly living of the believers. Because the world hates the Lord (John 7:7), when His believers incorporate benefit and virtue from His operation within them for their godly living in the world, the world hates them just as much (John 15:18; 17:14; 1 John 3:13). Though it may not realize this clearly, the world hates the believers' incorporation of Christ in their daily living, and the world is quick to show this hatred through all kinds of persecution.

### In Defeating God's Enemy

The apostles were acutely aware that God has an enemy and understood that this enemy is always at war with the believers. Of course, as mere human beings, the believers have little hope of being able to withstand the stratagems of the devil, but they can indeed overcome him through the operation of the Triune God within them.

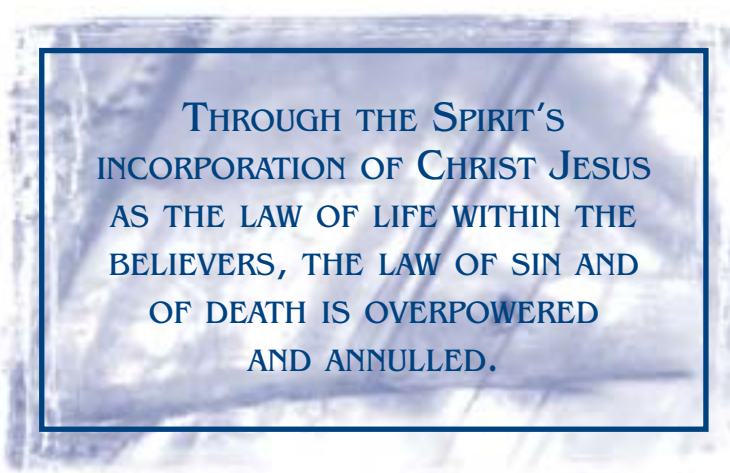
You are of God, little children; and you have

overcome them because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Now the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. (Rom. 16:20)

And receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints. (Eph. 6:17-18)

John tells the believers that they are "of God," and the sense in Greek (*ek tou theou*, literally, "out from God") is that they have their source in God. This refers to their being the children of God, which John has previously mentioned in a striking way in 3:1-2. But they are not children of God who are separate from Him; rather, He is the One "who is in you." Alford remarks, "He who is *ek tou theou* has God dwelling in him" (4: 487). And because He is within the believers, the believers have overcome the





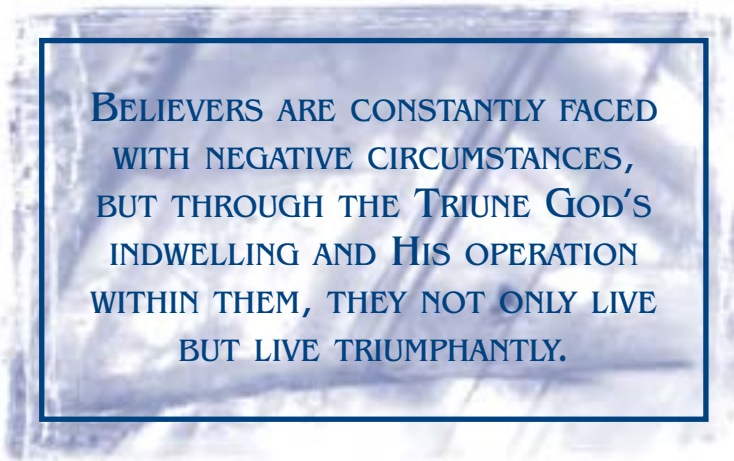
antichrist prophets who have gone out into the world (4:1-3). These prophets are driven by the devil “who is in the world,” that is, the chief ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 Cor. 2:6, 8; Eph. 2:2; 6:11-12), and to overcome these prophets is to overcome him. Two incorporations are indicated in this verse, one divine and one evil. God, the Father of the believers as little children, is within the believers operating, and the devil as the source of evil is operating in the antichrist prophets. But the One who operates in the believers is greater than he who is in the world, and because of His operation within them, they overcome the actions of the antichrist prophets who trouble the churches. The believers’ overcoming is their incorporation of the operation of the greater One who is in them.

As Paul nears the end of his Epistle to the Romans, he expresses not merely the wish but the resolute prediction that “the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (16:20). It is hard not to take this at face value and see in it a blatant reference to the believers’ incorporation of the operation of God within them. God will crush Satan, but He will do it under the believers’ feet. Alford points out that this is a similitude from Genesis 3:15: “He will bruise you on the head, / But you will bruise him on the heel” (2: 470), and this is probably the case, even if that prophecy was more technically fulfilled by Christ individually (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). But no doubt the application of Christ’s work on the cross to destroy the devil and his works is applied practically by God through the believers’ living in their Christian and church life, and that is what is indicated here. Further, in this verse Paul characterizes God as the “the God of peace.” Peace is probably referred to here in the same sense as in Ephesians 2:14-17, where Christ is said to be the peace between the Jews and Gentiles who have now been created into one new man and reconciled in one Body to God. The God of peace is God in relation to the one Body of Christ, where peace among the believers reigns and where such peace shames and even crushes Satan. Finally, Paul’s added benediction about the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in this verse should not be viewed as merely casual and independent. As always, Paul mentions the Lord’s grace as the divine provision for what has preceded. The God of peace will crush Satan under the believers’ feet only through their enjoyment of the Lord Jesus Christ as their grace.

In Ephesians 6:10-20 Paul speaks of the spiritual warfare that the believers must wage corporately against the devil. In verses 11 and 12 he makes it clear that this warfare is “against the stratagems of the devil” and “against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies,” and he charges the believers to “put on the whole armor of God.” The whole armor consists of the varied virtues of the Christian life as primarily

defenses (vv. 14-16). But in verse 17 Paul speaks of the one offensive weapon in this armor, the sword, and he says that this sword is something “of the Spirit.” *The sword of the Spirit, which [Spirit] is the word of God* is a difficult expression to interpret. Of the few particular problems that must be addressed, the first is the meaning of the genitive phrase *of the Spirit*. Commentators vary in their interpretations of it: “furnished, forged, by [the Spirit]” (Alford 3: 148), “given by the Spirit,” “belonging to the Spirit” (Fee 728). However, the four preceding genitives are clearly appositional: “the breastplate of righteousness” (= righteousness as the breastplate, v. 14), “the firm foundation of the gospel” (= the gospel as the firm foundation, v. 15), “the shield of faith” (= faith as the shield, v. 16), and “the helmet of salvation” (= salvation as the helmet, v. 17), and that would certainly recommend to us that by *the sword of the Spirit* Paul means the Spirit as the sword. Both Alford and Fee reject this meaning because, in their view, the relative clause that follows (“which is the word of God”) elaborates *sword* and negates the possibility for an appositive modifier after *sword*. But this hardly seems reasonable in light of Paul’s deliberate use of the genitive in the four verses here. An additional problem lies with the relative pronoun in the following relative clause. In Greek it is neuter in gender, and as a relative it should refer to *Spirit*, which is a neuter noun, and not to *sword*, which is a feminine noun. The gender of this relative has long troubled Greek commentators because, as it reads, it should be understood to mean “which Spirit is the word of God.” The translation quoted above (Recovery Version) renders the text according to this technical reading in Greek. To ameliorate what seems to be a harsh notion (i.e., that the Spirit is the word of God), many Greek scholars have appealed to a little-known phenomenon in Greek grammar called attraction, whereby the gender of a relative pronoun is attracted to that of the nearest noun rather than to that of its grammatical referent. (It is interesting to note that Alford and Fee cannot agree which noun the relative pronoun is attracted to here: Alford understands *word*; Fee, *Spirit*.) While that solves the problem of a text that does not match our concept, it really is not necessary to resort to such a solution. What if the sense is plainly this: “and receive...the Spirit as the sword, which Spirit [as the sword] is the word of God.” This is not as far-fetched as Greek commentators have made it out to be, especially in view of the fact that in Greek *the word of God* (*rhēma theou*) here is not what we would typically expect to read (*logos tou theou*, cf. 1 Cor. 14:36; 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2; Phil. 1:14; Col. 1:25; etc.) Paul is deliberately referring not to the word of God in its content and message (*logos*) but to the word of God as something spoken and instant (*rhema*) in the believers. This word, Fee admits, is “inspired by the Spirit” (729), and this is no doubt correct. How else could the *logos* of God be the instant and spoken *rhema* if not through the operation of the Spirit within the believers? But in addition to the logic

in his words, Paul's utterance agrees with what the Lord Jesus says in John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words [*rhēma*, here plural] which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." It is not at all far-fetched to associate the Lord's speaking with the Spirit's operation, especially if we accept that the Spirit incorporates within the believers the Lord's operation. Thus, there is no reason to understand this text in any way other than how it seems to sit in its context and according to its face value. In the final analysis, even though it may not be of major concern to most, the question of the referent of the relative pronoun is moot if we accept that Paul is offering a fifth genitive of apposition here. It can be said to refer to either Spirit directly (according to the strict rules of grammar) or to the Spirit as the sword (according to an exception to the rules). But either way, the meaning is the same. When the Spirit operates within the believers to make real the *logos* of God inwardly and even verbally in their own speaking, they find a ready and effective sword at hand to defeat God's enemy. They incorporate this operation of the Spirit not in their casual speaking but, most effectively, in their prayer, as the next verse makes very clear. This is how they "receive...the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the *rhema* of God."



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The believers are constantly faced with numerous negative circumstances, but according to the revelation in the New Testament, they do not simply muster up their strength and suffer through it all. Through the Triune God's indwelling and, more so, His operation within them, they not only live but live triumphantly. All negative circumstances provide the practical environment for them to incorporate the operations of the Triune God in their daily life. But even greater than this, the believers also enjoy a multitude of positive spiritual functions, which all issue from their incorporation of His operation within them. In no way are the believers expected to live their Christian and church life, and indeed their basic human life, apart from the Triune God. Rather, their living with all its functions, in both positive and negative circumstances, should be precisely according to the Lord's word of promise in John 14:18-20:

I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you

behold Me; because I live, you also shall live. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

The believers are in Christ, and He is in them, as also He is in the Father; and because of this mutual abiding, the believers can live as He lives. He has not left them as orphans; rather, He who is in the Father is now in them, living and operating, and through this, they incorporate Him in all that they are and do as His believers. [AFC](#)

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